

The future of electronic entertainment issue#111
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The Movies, Black &
Previewed: Shinobi, T
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Breed, Super Monke
Reviewed: Dungeon
Tekken 4, Spider-Ma
Plus: Inside Capcom
Console price war re
Deus Ex II
Believe...



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The future of electronic entertainment



Deus Ex II is one of the few games **Edge** plans to put on its cover this year. The criteria is demanding yet simple: the titles must promise to revolutionise their respective genres.

In Ion Storm's sequel to the fabulous *Deus Ex*, for instance, NPCs talk to each other. Not a selection of scripted exchanges, you understand – they *actually* talk to each other. But by far the most significant aspect of this is that it's not the game's most impressive feature. You can read about those from p58 onwards.

In a sense, games such as *Halo* and *Deus Ex II* signal the beginning of a new era for gaming. The step into 3D in the mid-'90s probably marks the last genuine videogaming revolution and while few technical leaps of that stature remain, we can expect the focus to now shift to significant thematic and creative progression on a more regular basis instead.

And this is where differentiating between softcos is becoming increasingly easier. No longer will it be enough to dazzle players with clever hardware manipulation while failing to push the game mechanic as far – pretty visuals but pretty restrained gameplay will be relegated to the bargain bin. Content is the new lens flare (but in a good way).



Features















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Editorial
Future Publishing
30 Monmouth Street, Bath, BA1 2BW
Telephone 01225 442244
Fax 01225 732275
Email edge@futurenet.co.uk
Edge Website www.edge-online.com

People on Edge
João Diniz-Sanches editor
Terry Stokes art editor
Scott Bradbury production editor
Mark Walbank features editor
David McCarthy news editor
Ste Curran reviews editor
Darren Phillips deputy art editor
Christophe Kagotani Tokyo bureau

Contributors
Scott Anthony, Tim Guest, Jon Jordan, Lupin Kojima, Scott Longstaff, Peter Lyle, Toshihiro Nagoshi, Lucy Owen, Steven Poole, RedEye, Keith Stuart, Garrick Webster

Production
Kirsty Bell senior production coordinator
Rose Griffiths production manager
Colin Polis commercial buyer

Circulation
Tom Shaw product manager
Regina Erak circulation manager

Advertising
Jayne Caple deputy advertising director
Lucy Owen deputy advertising manager
Katerina Hetherington recruitment executive
Advertising phone 01225 732218

Publishing
Ian Miller group art editor
James Binns publisher
Tamara Longden promotions manager
Simon Wear overseas licensing
David Maher-Roberts group publishing di

Subscriptions & distribution
Future Publishing Ltd
FREEPOST BS4900, Somerton TA11 7BR
Telephone 01458 271184
Fax 01225 822523
Email edge.subs@futurenet.co.uk

Distributed through the UK newstrade by **S**
Distribution, 86 Newman Street, London W
Telephone 0207 907 6000

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Senior management
Roger Parry non-executive chairman
Greg Ingham chief executive
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The 'where's the cover?' issue















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"Whatever he hits, he destroys!"


XBOX
NINTENDO
GAMECUBE

The Price Is Right

The competition heats up as Microsoft and Nintendo cut console prices, creating new records for fastest price cut and cheapest console launch

The struggle for dominance of the lucrative space under the nation's TVs gathered pace last month, when both Microsoft and Nintendo cut the price of their respective consoles. Since the price cuts, the Xbox has been available for £199, while the GameCube has been on sale at a price of £129. Perhaps unfairly, the two respective price cuts were greeted with contrasting responses from pundits.

Microsoft's announcement, which arrived little more than a month after the Xbox launch on April 26, led to speculation that the console has not been a roaring success in Europe – a view that was quickly compounded by the resignation of Seamus Blackley, one of the key figures behind Xbox. For Nintendo, the price cut gave its impressive pre-launch publicity campaign a significant boost. Despite the reduced price offered by its two competitors, Sony has declared that it will not be cutting the price of the PlayStation2 in response.

Both Microsoft and Nintendo were keen to distance their decision to reduce prices from the threat of rivals. Instead, Microsoft was attributing its decision to a higher than expected software ratio – arguing that Xbox owners were buying more games than the company had foreseen, and that the higher margins on these games made the price cut possible. According to ChartTrack, the attach rate in the UK after two weeks of sales was 2.8 games for every Xbox sold. In the US, this figure was even higher, with NPDFunworldSM quoting attach rates of 3.9 after four months on sale – the highest rate of any next-generation console. Consumers who had bought an Xbox prior to the price cut were reimbursed with a package available from www.xbox.com/uk, consisting of a choice of two firstparty games and an extra controller.



"We're glad Microsoft has made an aggressive move to remove the price barrier and put this fantastic console into more European homes"



Early reports as Edge goes to press suggest that the GameCube launch went well. Next issue will contain a full report

Although this compensation package was almost universally well received, giving sales of the console a welcome boost, the subsequent departure of Seamus Blackley to start up a development company prompted some speculation that all was not well within the Xbox camp. Blackley's decision to quit came after Microsoft had revised its forecasted Xbox shipments down from 4.5m–6m to 3.5m–4m by the end of June, following poorer than expected sales in Europe and Japan. Both Blackley and Microsoft were adamant that the two events were unrelated, an argument backed up by the fact that Blackley was still using his Xbox email address after the announcement (suggesting that he hadn't been escorted from the building in the traditional US manner). Details of Blackley's company will be announced later this month at E3, with statements in interviews suggesting that it will have something to do with funding "creative, risky" videogame projects.

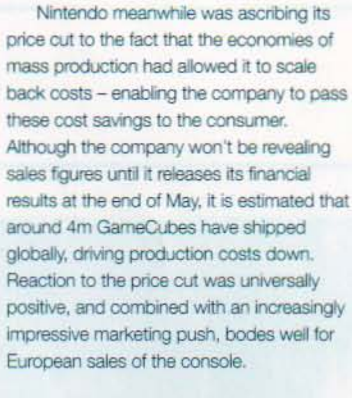
Microsoft has had some cause for cheer in recent months though, with *Halo* hitting global sales figures of more than one million units. Significantly, despite a lack of launch day hype, the title also spurred an increase in Japanese sales of Xbox, with Bloomberg reporting that weekly sales of the console increased from 2,800 to 4,700 in the week that the game launched. Although Xbox sales of 177,000 units in Japan is still short of the forecasted 250,000, this is still good news for Microsoft, and is expected to be backed up at E3 with details of online services for Xbox and a number of as yet unrevealed titles (see p12).



In the weeks building up to the launch of the GameCube, Nintendo promoted its console by installing a number of perspex cubes outside HMV stores across the UK



The resignation of Seamus Blackley, combined with a downwards revision of forecasted unit sales, prompted much negative speculation, but after the price cut, the Xbox appears to be selling well



Nintendo meanwhile was ascribing its price cut to the fact that the economies of mass production had allowed it to scale back costs – enabling the company to pass these cost savings to the consumer. Although the company won't be revealing sales figures until it releases its financial results at the end of May, it is estimated that around 4m GameCubes have shipped globally, driving production costs down. Reaction to the price cut was universally positive, and combined with an increasingly impressive marketing push, bodes well for European sales of the console.

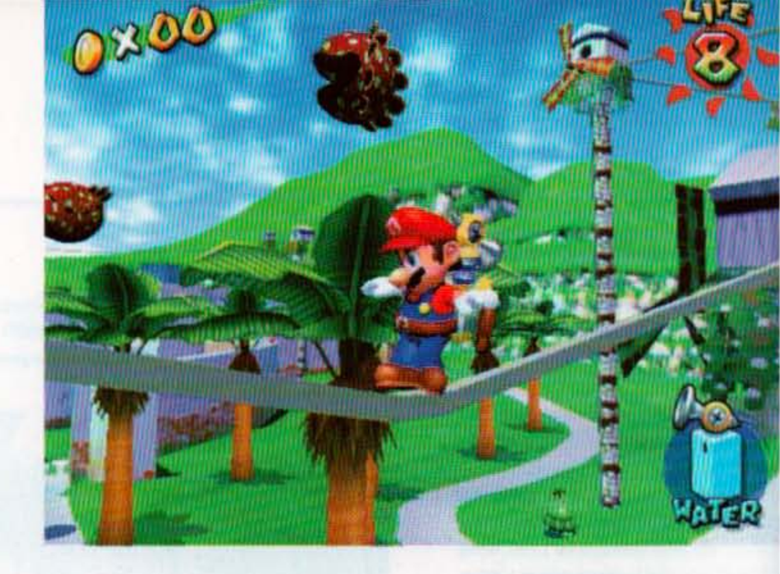
Euro cash

In addition to sponsorship deals with Yahoo for the World Cup Website, and with MTV, Nintendo assigned €100m to its European promotional campaign, with €30m earmarked for the UK launch. A sophisticated TV advertising run was complemented by the appearance outside HMV stores in Glasgow, Birmingham and London, of Clear Cubes. These perspex cubes, seven feet in size appeared from April 26 up until the console's launch on May 3, and housed a bizarre entertainment schedule that included contortionists and magicians along with new teenband, AllSTARS and the unveiling of Asher D's new music video.

Nintendo was rewarded by the preorders received in advance of the launch. Even before the price cut was announced, preorders had reached 30,000, with many of **Edge**'s local retailers running out of stock. Nintendo planned to make 500,000 units available in Europe at launch, with a further 500,000 to follow.



Microsoft recently announced that *Halo* has sold a million copies since its US release last year, and the game's Japanese launch gave sales of the console a much-needed boost



Retailers greeted news of the price cuts positively – particularly Microsoft's decision to bring the Xbox price in line with that of PlayStation2. "Xbox sales have been good but now there's an even greater sales potential for us," declared **Lisa Morgan**, of the Game Group. "If there has been one limiting factor it has been price. We're glad Microsoft has made an aggressive move to remove the price barrier and put this fantastic console into more European homes in a quicker timeframe. This is going to benefit the industry as well as customers." Although retailers were less forthcoming about the GameCube price cut, their decision to universally endorse the revised price – despite their protestations that Nintendo's earlier price point was set too low for them to make a worthwhile margin (the margin at the new price is expected to be around £10) – was both revealing and encouraging.

Despite their repeated denials, it seems unlikely that the two manufacturers independently decided to cut their prices

> "We always wanted to make sure that we brought GameCube to market on launch date at the best possible price we could"

within the space of one week. It's clear that the PAL region is acquiring an increasing significance in the outcome of the global competition between the big three manufacturers. Nevertheless the true state of play was revealed by Sony's recent announcement that it is increasing its forecasted shipments of PlayStation2 to 20m units this financial year.

Sony has also declared that it will not be cutting the price of PlayStation2 in the UK in response to competition from Microsoft and Nintendo. Building on shipments of 18.1m consoles shipped in the year to March 2002, it's in a well-established position of strength, and both of its rivals have their work cut out if they are to challenge Sony's hegemony.



In addition to a well-received launch line-up, Nintendo is bolstering its releas schedule with *Super Mario Sunshine*, destined for a Christmas UK release

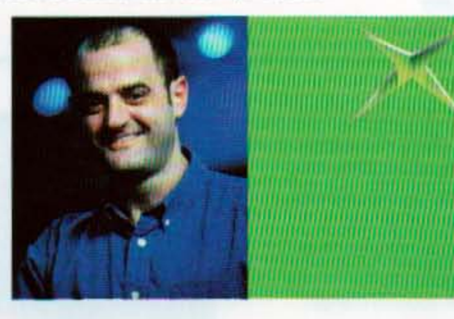


Some of the acts that Nintendo include in its promotional perspex cubes were more than a little bizarre, to say the leas

Price Cut Q&A

Edge spoke to representatives from Microsoft and Nintendo to discuss the recent price cuts







Shelly Friend, Nintendo

Why has Nintendo decided to cut the price of the GameCube, and why now?

We always wanted to make sure that we brought GameCube to market on launch date at the best possible price we could. This is now the cheapest ever console launch, because we've been able to reach mass production in Japan and America prior to the UK launch – we've shipped 4m units in Japan and the US – which just means it's now cheaper to manufacture. We wanted to make sure that this reduction was passed on to the consumer. The good news is that it's happened pre-launch. There's nothing more annoying than buying something and seeing it come down in price later on. And that was key for us; we wanted to launch at the best possible price because we've got a great launch software line up. So when people go into stores on launch date, there's everything they could possibly need.

So the price cut had nothing to do with Microsoft's price cut?

No. We always wanted to bring it in at the best possible price, and we reached mass production, and the great thing is that we did it pre-launch.

How did retailers respond to the price cut?

Retailers set the prices in the UK, it's not a price that's set by us. So we gave retailers a guide. The important thing is that this price gets to the consumer, and I think that most of them have come out in favour of our recommended £129 price point. So generally everyone is excited about this price point, because it's going to drive sales massively.

Is there a danger that a low price point will perpetuate GameCube's image as a child's toy?

No. The GameCube is just a box to play games on; it's not about the console, it's about the games. And you've only got to look at the launch line-up to see that this is not about kids, it's about everybody. It's got games to suit any age, all tastes, all genres. We've got specific titles out for older audiences like *Resident Evil*, but most of the games we've got are aimed at everybody. We don't target an age, we target everyone who loves playing games.

Will this price cut affect the price of the GBA?

We've got no plans to do any price change with regard to the Game Boy Advance.

Is there a danger that a high profile price war might undermine consumer confidence in the sector? Will consumers delay buying a console in expectation of further price cuts?

It's confusing for consumers to go into a store and not be sure when the price is going to come down – because historically launches have been followed by price cuts. So that's why we decided to cut the price now, rather than post-launch. This is it now; we've got absolutely no plans to make any other price changes. We obviously can't comment about what the other guys in the industry are doing, but as far as we're concerned, we wanted to do it now, pre-launch, so everyone knows this is the best deal.

Chris Lewis, Microsoft

Why has Microsoft decided to cut the price of the Xbox, and why now?

If you think back to when we announced the price in late summer last year at the X01 event in Cannes, we announced the price based on the competitive landscape of the time. We said at the time that we would remain competitive. The landscape has altered a little bit between then and now. This latest price drop is recognition of the fact that we need to remain competitive and will remain competitive.

Obviously the landscape has changed again since your price cut announcement. What is your response to Nintendo's announced price cut?

I think the incredible value represented by Xbox got even better when we announced our price reduction. It is the most powerful console on the market. It enables a more vivid, detailed gameplay experience. Our competitors obviously felt that they needed to do something in response to our announcement, but from our perspective, we've always thought that Xbox is fantastic value for money, and we don't build our strategy on everything that the competition is doing. But we do remain mindful of the overall landscape. Perhaps it acknowledges that our competitors needed to do something to respond to our lead in terms of the price point.

How did retailers respond to the price cut?

They were pleased about the impetus that it creates – that it drives more people into stores to buy consoles. So it's great news for retail and it's great news for publishers as well. But I think the real winner is the consumer.

Is it sending out the wrong signal to consumers, to cut the price so soon after launch? There have been some suggestions that the price cut reflects slow sales of the Xbox.

We're actually really happy with the Xbox so far; we've got fantastic game sales – we're attaching in excess of three games on average for every console; we've sold in excess of a million units of *Halo* worldwide. So consumers appear to love Xbox, and for us it's just about ensuring that there are no obstacles to more and more sales of the Xbox.

But if Microsoft was making a loss at the £299 price point, what changed between now and then to facilitate the lower price?

The economics are really all about how many games that you sell. As I mentioned, we're particularly happy with the game sales – not just in Europe, but everywhere on the planet. We've outstripped our competition in terms of attach rate consistently since launch. And the economics of the console business say that is really where the sweetspot is. So we've looked hard at the economics of this decision and we still feel good about it.

What about those who would point to the price cut and question Microsoft's long-term support for Xbox? How strong is Microsoft's strategic will?

It's total and absolute. We're absolutely in this for the long-term. Across our business, we don't do things by halves, and we don't enter new marketplaces unless we've truly thought through what our success criteria are. This latest price drop shows that we remain absolutely committed to the European business. We're absolutely committed to remaining competitive, and we're clearly in this for the long-term.

The price cut and Seamus Blackley's departure coincided with each other. Are you worried that this might send out the wrong signal to consumers?

Xbox is doing extremely well; we're off to a fantastic start. With regard to Seamus, he just wants to go and write games for Xbox. His departure from Microsoft was absolutely about him wanting to pursue something different right now, and the two are fundamentally not linked.

Why did you choose to offer the reward pack?

Everywhere in our business, the satisfaction of our customers is critical. We don't want our early adopters to feel anything other than even better about that purchase, and the reward pack is all about better access to more great games. So for us it was a very natural decision. And we've got a pretty big support infrastructure that's been built with efficiency in mind, so we'll make sure that the reward pack gets out to customers quickly.

Is there a danger that a high profile price war might undermine consumer confidence in the sector? Will consumers delay buying a console in expectation of further price cuts?

I actually think that the people who benefit most when the competition hots up – and clearly we do have a very competitive landscape at the moment, with several great console manufacturers – is the consumer. The games gets better, the price points get keener, and we're all kept on our toes by one another, and ultimately the true winner is the gamer. We've tried to remain mindful though of our early adopters, to reward their loyalty with the reward pack – as long as you reward those early adopters, I think it's great for the consumer.

Mayan attraction

Alias|Wavefront slashes prices on Maya, but how likely are games developers to switch to this high-end 3D app?

With the rise of 3D as the predominant graphical form used in videogames, one name has stood above all others in the creation of the graphics, 3ds max. Certainly, no other 3D application is more closely associated with games development than Discreet's $3,500 software.

This could be all be about to change, however. At the end of March, Alias|Wavefront announced a dramatic price drop for its Hollywood-class 3D and character animation tool, Maya. With Maya Complete's price cut from £6,330 to £1,449 (ex-VAT), and its all-inclusive big brother Maya Unlimited dropping from £13,560 to £4,899 (ex-VAT), many in the industry were left momentarily astounded.

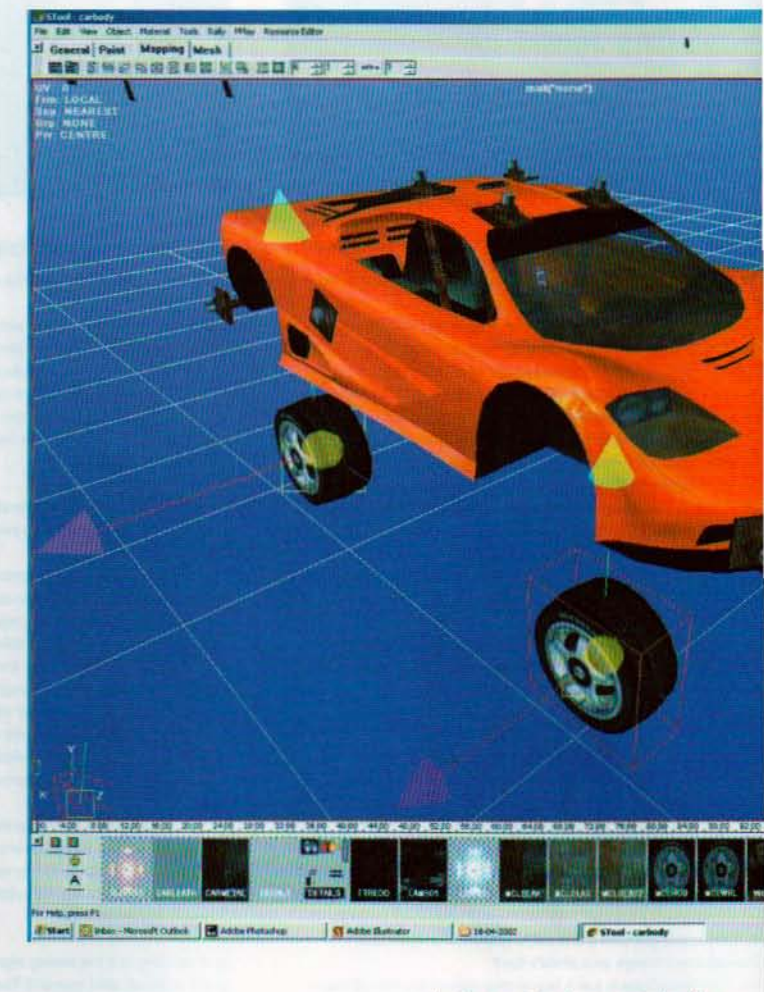
Mayan treasure

Traditionally the sought after application in the animation and effects industries, for film and television, Maya had been gradually making roads into the games market, but the price cut finally puts it pretty squarely in competition with 3ds max. With the bigger and wealthier development studios already using Maya, a product known for its character animation toolset and MEL scripting language, this new level of affordability places it within the grasp of many other games houses.

Alias|Wavefront's president **Doug Walker** already believes the application is winning the battle for the hearts of game artists. "Last Christmas six of the top ten games were actually built with Maya," he told **Edge**. "We think that the reason for that, is the cinematic quality of the experiences that you can create in Maya compared with any other software are pretty outstanding, as new consoles really develop in their ability to really perform."

The roster of existing Maya users is impressive. They include SCEE, Electronic Arts, Infogrames, Rare and Core Design. And they're using it to create both cut-scene cinematic animations and in-game material. According to Doug Walker, it's those at the top of the revenue tree who are using Maya. "One thing that's happened already is that where companies are making money building games they're building a lot of those games with Maya. So we're seeing a trend start because what you really care about in this business is being one of the top 20 or 25 games," he says.

So with the price cut, who is switching to Maya as a 3D tool of choice, and what are the issues? Paradigm, the developer now under Infogrames US, is one company that has switched max seats for Maya. Here in the UK, Climax made the change some time ago. "We switched over to Maya primarily because at the time we couldn't get the level of functionality from max and character studio with regards to the more complex character animation work we started to undertake for Xbox," says **Joseph Cavalla**, managing director of Climax Fareham. "Since that time we have steadily moved away from max to Maya, which is then complemented by our own proprietary tools."



55,000 Maya-trained artists graduate every year, and Alias/Wavefront is hoping that corporate presentation and education will be two areas for its software, in addition to the games market

Old favourite

However, it has to be said that 3ds max's inverse kinematics and character animation tools have improved with version 4 of the application. Max's polygon modeller is favoured by artists as well. And with

Alias and its products

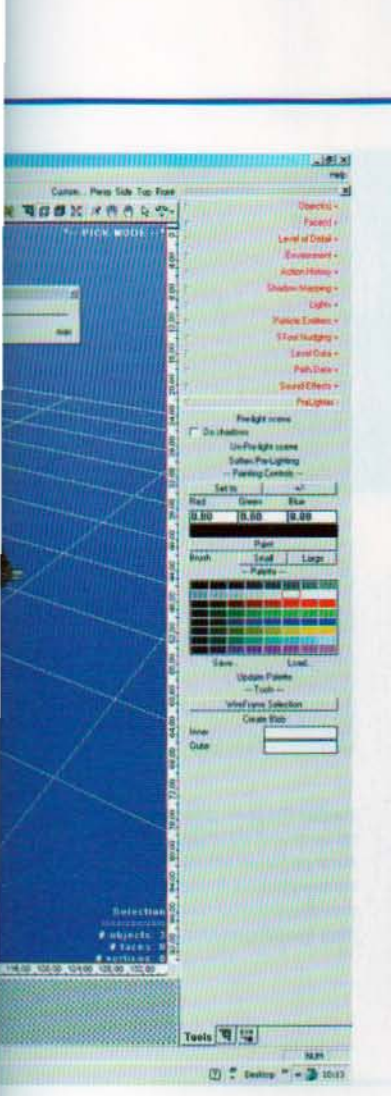
Alias|Wavefront is doubly proud of any work relating to the Xbox. Forty per cent of the company's business comes from its CAD/CAM wing, which sells an application for StudioTools. (Version 10 has just been released.) The application is used widely in automobile and consumer product design, and was in fact used to design the shape of the Xbox. Meanwhile, games such as *SSX Tricky* were developed with Maya, leading Alias to claim that both the machine and its software were developed with its tools.

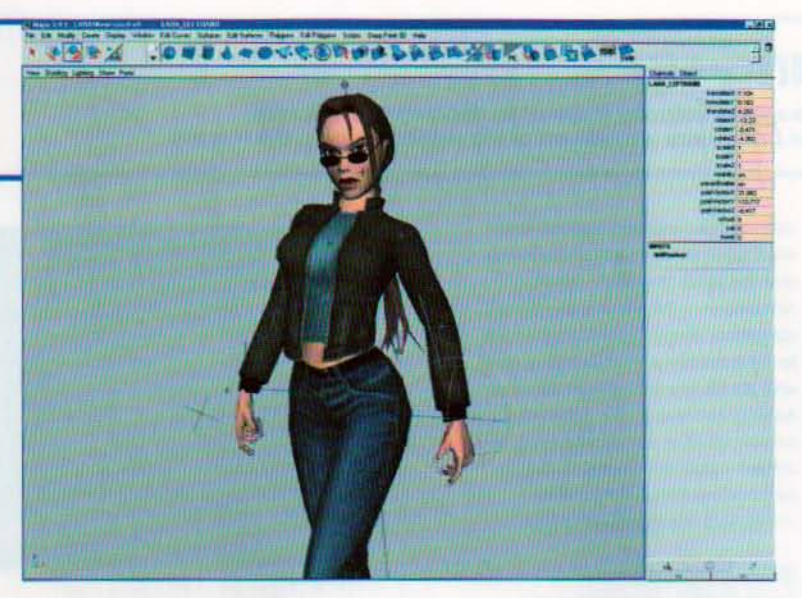
Meanwhile, anyone wondering what happened to Maya Builder, the sub-product created specifically for game level designers, should be made aware that this product has been discontinued. Users with maintenance contracts will be given a free upgrade to Maya Complete by the end of June.

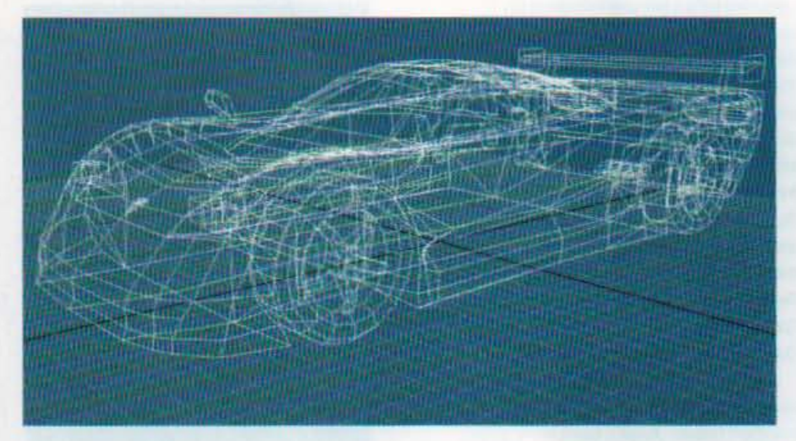




Both the Xbox and the game *SSX Tricky* were developed using Alias|Wavefront tools. The former with StudioTools and the latter using Maya







Maya is a challenger to 3ds max at its new price, but developers such as Kuju, who modelled this car, have pipelines set up for max and won't be switching immediately (top). Stainless Games has developed its very own 3D application, entitled STool (left)

Discreet's application so entrenched in the working pipelines of so many studios, a move to Maya isn't as practicable as Alias|Wavefront would like to think.

Julian Davies, technical director of Kuju Entertainment explains, "We have a huge amount of in-house experience of using max in our art and design teams, and a significant investment in cross-company plug-ins and programmer expertise. The value of this will decline over time, however in the short term this is an important issue, and re-tooling would be expensive. We don't generally consider it a good idea to re-tool part way through a project, so no existing project is likely to switch."

Others still favour neither 3D system, and prefer to write their own applications for the creation of graphics. Stainless Games, for instance, has proprietary software lovingly referred to as 'STool'. While max is still used for modelling, STool covers the application of textures, character animation, skinning, accessory placement, building physics, dynamics, particle systems, vertex lighting, shadow mapping and mesh editing. With a feature list like that, perhaps it should be on the market itself.

Holding firm

Across the counter from Alias|Wavefront's position, Discreet is holding firm. "The Maya price change is not news in games," says **Keith Russell**, EMEA manager. "We have seen companies offering this price before, even free in certain cases. However developers still choose to work with 3ds max because of its toolset, its ease of learning, availability of talent, availability of thirdparty plug-ins, it fits into their production pipeline, and the support from all the middleware developers, plus our multi-pack pricing."

While Discreet may still hold the upper hand in the games market, the Maya price cut is generally good news for the industry. It brings a high-end and well-respected set of tools, capable of very high quality results, within the grasp of far more artists than previously was the case. Alias/Wavefront reckons that 55,000 Maya-trained artists graduate every year worldwide, and is hoping that corporate presentation and education will be two big new application areas for its software, in addition to the games market. The question going forward is whether or not the company will be able to sell enough seats at the new price to cover its R&D and marketing expenses.

CUTTINGS



Kuju wins Warhammer 40K

Following THQ's acquisition of the videogame rights to Games Workshop's hugely popular tabletop wargame, Warhammer 40,000, last year, the publisher has signed up Kuju Entertainment to develop a PlayStation2 title based on the property. According to THQ, the licence was hotly contested by 30 other developers before it was granted to Kuju. Significantly, Games Workshop will be providing access to all the characters and races from the Warhammer 40,000 mythos, and the company's creators and designers will be working closely with Kuju's development team to ensure a faithful videogame adaptation.

Videogames get super powers

THQ has also signed up several high-profile comic-book franchises for videogame conversion. Hot on the heels of other superpowered titles such as *Freedom Force*, *Spider-Man* and *Superman*, the publisher has secured the right to produce videogames based on Marvel heroes Captain America, The Punisher and Nick Fury, on all hardware platforms. Meanwhile, Midway has signed up the licence to publish titles based on the DC Comics property, Justice League America, giving it the right to feature the likes of Batman, Superman, The Flash, Wonder Woman and Green Lantern in videogame feats of derring-do against evildoers such as The Joker, Lex Luthor and Gorilla Grodd.

GameCube gets Pro Logic

Nintendo has announced that it is to make Dolby Pro Logic II tools available to all GameCube developers, allowing them to deliver five channels of surround-sound through a conventional stereo set-up. Originally developed as a supplement for Dolby Digital, Dolby Pro Logic II was featured in the LucasArts title, *Rogue Squadron II: Rogue Leader*, and will be available to other developers via Factor 5's MusyX development tool, which will be offered exclusively by Nintendo. "Pro Logic II is ideal for Nintendo GameCube because the technology allows developers to create astounding audio effects in their games without a significant hit to the console's CPU," said **Jack Buser**, manager of Game Developer Relations Dolby Laboratories.

E3 rumour round-up

It's that time of year again: the videogame industry is about to decamp to California. In advance of the event itself, Edge brings you a rundown of the rumours doing the rounds

For the eighth successive year, pretty much the whole of the videogame industry will be relocating to the Electronic Entertainment Expo to variously unveil new titles, divulge hitherto hard-kept secrets, outline business strategies, and just generally hobnob and lark about with other members of the industry. E3 2002, cheesily subtitled 'A World of Its Own', is set to take place from May 21–24 at the Los Angeles Convention Center, combining a general exhibition with a three-day Conference Program featuring a series of workshops and panel discussions. As usual, the months leading up to the event have seen plenty of speculation, and rumour-mongering.

One of the major rumours is that Sony will be officially announcing PlayStation3 in LA, with 'The Independent' reporting that development of Sony's next next-gen hardware is in advanced stages, and Japanese financial analysts pointing to previous announcements regarding the collaboration of Toshiba, Sony and IBM on new chip technology. 'The Independent' went on to report that PlayStation3 is being optimised for online gaming. The development community remains tight-lipped.

Other, more extreme rumours concern Microsoft's acquisition strategy. Internet message boards, for example, have been pointing to the prospect of Microsoft taking full control over Japanese developer Enix – which would certainly make strategic sense given the Xbox's slow start in Japan. According to an **Edge** source and Internet speculators, Microsoft is also in the running for the acquisition of UK powerhouse, Rare, while a publishing deal between Rare and Activision also seems to be on the cards – a rumour backed up by the shift in emphasis of Rare's recruitment adverts. It's also rumoured that *Perfect Dark 0* will be unveiled at E3 – perhaps even on PS2.

Show business

Elsewhere at E3, amid the throng of celebrities (which this year includes such luminaries as Mr T and Bruce Campbell alongside a handful of WWF wrestlers and Playboy models), virtually every major publisher will be showing off their wares. Some highlights include *Rayman* creator, Michel Ancel, unveiling his latest work, and the videogame adaptation of 'Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon'. Capcom will be showcasing *Steel Battalion (Tekki)* and a thirdperson wild west title called *Red Dead Revolver*, and Sega will be demonstrating *Crazy Taxi 3: High Roller*, *Panzer Dragoon Orta*, and *The House of the Dead III*.

But this is just the tip of the iceberg of a show that is expected to demonstrate a resurgent industry. **Edge**'s report in **E**112, will separate rumour from fact.









***Panzer Dragoon Orta* (pictured) is likely to be one of E3's highlights, with titles such as *Doom III* and *Wario World* also to be unveiled for the first time. Nintendo and Microsoft are also expected to reveal their broadband services (see below)**

Xbox lives

It's rumour overdrive as speculation concerning Microsoft's online plans gather pace

Also expected to be unveiled at E3 are particulars of Microsoft's Xbox online service offering. Sony, of course, has already outlined its broadband strategy for the US and Japan, while Nintendo is apparently also due to make an announcement at E3. But whereas details of Nintendo's offering remain unclear, leaked documents and the work of Internet theorists are beginning to build up a picture of Microsoft's broadband content offering, which is expected to be called Xbox Live.

First, the initial line-up of online compatible titles will include *Unreal Championship*, *Ghost Recon*, *MechAssault*, *Whacked!*, and *NFL Fever*.

Second, the compatible hardware, which will include Microsoft's revolutionary Voice Commander peripheral. Apparently Microsoft is insisting that this will be supported by every online-compatible title, and since it plugs into the controller, up to four players will be able to use it during gameplay. Interestingly, as well as allowing voice modification, this peripheral will also make speech recognition possible, via Fonix's Automatic Speech Recognition toolset, which has been added to the Xbox development kit.

Third, Microsoft has revealed that each Xbox will be able to support up to eight user accounts. Although users are not tied to a single Xbox, it will still be possible to ban cheats or abusive members of the community. Significantly, it will also be possible for Xbox owners to trial Xbox Live without subscribing, by means of a guest account, with limited accessibility to the full online featureset.

Pricing model

And finally, leaked documents appear to suggest the type of pricing model that the service will use. Subscribers will be expected to pay an ongoing subscription to the service, rather than a pay-as-you-go structure, while the online architecture has been designed so that software publishers will be able to offer secure in-game online transactions – making it possible for them to sell further content, such as upgrades and expansions, with ease and without removing players from their game. And despite the introduction of the first Xbox add-on in the US (for *DoA3*), these documents stress that the system will not be allowed to create software patches, except to refine security by means of an auto-update function that makes it possible to fix security holes.

Expect these rumours to be clarified in **Edge**'s full E3 report next issue.

Game On...

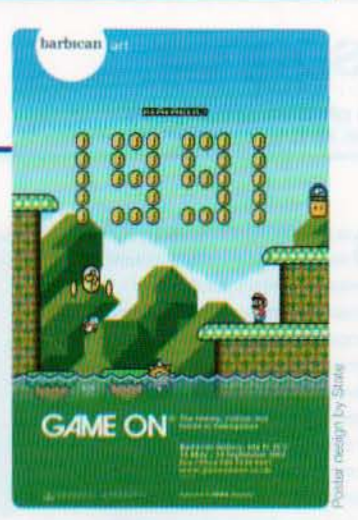
The UK's first major exhibition devoted to understanding the development and influence of videogaming has begun

As showcased in **E**109, the UK's first major exhibition devoted to the development and influence of videogames is currently underway at the Barbican Gallery in London. 'Game On: The Culture and History of Videogames' runs from May 16 to September 15, and covers the history and culture of videogames from 1962–2002 – examining their technological evolution along with their broader cultural diffusion. The event is organised by the Barbican Gallery in collaboration with the National Museums of Scotland, and **Edge** is a media partner.





'Game On' runs at the Barbican Gallery in London, from May 16 to September 15



Poster design by Stake

School project

The exhibition itself will be divided into 15 different sections, featuring a wide selection of videogame related material, including a comprehensive listing of games, ranging from *Space War!* on the DEC PDP-1 computer, which will be included in the display with the original paper tape code of the game, through to titles such as *Deus Ex* and *Tokimeki Memorial*.

The exhibition is supported by a nationwide Web-based schools project aimed at encouraging schools to use videogames as tools for learning, which will feature a video documenting the making of *Black & White*. It will also be accompanied by a season of films influenced by the aesthetics of videogames, including 'Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon', 'Tron' and 'The Matrix'. The film season is supported by PlayStation2, and Sony will also be funding a number of film making bursaries at the London Institute.

Although the headline event, called 'The State of Play' will have already taken place by the time this issue reaches you, the exhibition will close with a panel discussion of the future of videogaming called 'The End of Play', which takes place on September 7. A series of eight new themed commissions by artists, architects and designers rounds off the show, and attendees will also be able to take advantage of 'The Game On Antique Roadshow', on June 19 and July 3, to have their old consoles and software valued by an expert.

Following its run at the Barbican, the 'Game On' exhibition will tour across Europe, America and Japan. For more information, call the ticket hotline on 0207 638 8891 or visit http://www.gameonweb.co.uk

Recently Reviewed

Edge brings you a rundown of last issue's review scores

Title	Platform	Publisher	Developer	Score
Biohazard	GC	Capcom	In-house	8
Deus Ex	PS2	Eidos Interactive	Ion Storm	8
Onimusha 2: Samurai's Destiny	PS2	Capcom	In-house	8
Crash	Xbox	Rage	In-house	7
Freedom Force	PC	EA/Crave Entertainment	Irrational Games	7
Doshin the Giant	GC	Nintendo	In-house	5
GunValkyrie	Xbox	Sega	Smilebit	5
Sled Storm	PS2	Electronic Arts	In-house	5
Animal Leader	GC	Nintendo	In-house	4
Star Wars Jedi Knight II: Jedi Outcast	PC	Activision	LucasArts	4
Smashing Drive	GC	Namco	Point of View	3
Super Trucks	PS2	Jester Interactive	In-house	3
Nezmix	Xbox	Microsoft	Media Vision	2



Biohazard



Deus Ex



Onimusha 2



Freedom Force

CUTTINGS



GAME gets results

One sign of the resurgence in the videogame market was provided by the recently announced financial results of the UK's largest videogame retailer, GAME Group (formerly Electronics Boutique). The results indicated that the company's net income for the second half of its financial year almost doubled compared to last year, from £8.9m to £16m. Attributing the results to the performance of PS2 and GBA, demand is set to increase further after the introduction of Xbox and GameCube. Sales of Xbox reportedly increased threefold in the wake of its price being dropped to £199, while early reports as **Edge** goes to press indicate that 75,000 GameCubes were sold within the first two days of it going on sale.

Videogame resurgence

Further signs of a renaissance at retail were provided by a recent ELSPA report that videogame sales have increased by 20 per cent compared to last year. Although figures provided by ChartTrack only show a six per cent increase in unit sales, to 11m units sold in the first quarter of 2002, the value of these games sold rose from £219m in the first quarter of 2001 to £262m in 2002. The rapid sales of Konami's *Metal Gear Solid 2* proved a significant factor, with sales of over 200,000 reached in only three weeks.

breathepro launches new ADSL service

A new Internet provider called breathepro has launched a high quality ADSL service aimed at hardcore gamers. Priced at £25.99 per month with a one-off activation charge of £65, the service will work with standard ADSL modems, available from high street retailers. The company boasts that self install and setup is quick and user friendly, and supported by 24-hour customer services. Added extras included in the ADSL service include free bulk mail facility, Website creator, Web space and a range of office applications. For more information, see http://www.breathepro.com

www.qubesoft.co

Back to the source

QubeSoft's founder revolutionised 3D graphics with DirectX; now it's ready for a new challenge with its Q technology

The bigger picture

The version of Q to be released in June is labelled 1.0. In QubeSoft terms, this is a combined version of what will eventually become individual clientside and serverside technologies. "In this situation, we are just using the serverside technology to stream data off the CD," Servan Keondjian explains. "Our plan for the next major version in 2004 is to ship the server technology as a separate entity." This is designed to scale massively and thus allow developers to create and host persistent online worlds, as well as singleplayer environments, streaming content to any PC or console capable of running the Q clientside engine using a broadband or narrowband connection.

Back in the days when 3D graphics were beyond the reach of most developers, there were three competing British games technology companies. Ironically, the de facto winner, RenderMorphics is now almost unknown, unlike the other two, Criterion and Argonaut. The reason is, the battle was over Microsoft's desire to buy a technology to standardise 3D graphics for its Windows 95 platform. As the victor, RenderMorphics was subsumed into what became the DirectX team. The rest is history.

"I left Microsoft halfway through DirectX 5," recalls **Servan Keondjian**, QubeSoft's managing director. "The exciting part for me was done by that point. Microsoft is a good company for shipping product but you can't do cool stuff there; everything is political. Small companies are where I like to be."

That was how Keondjian and a couple of his RenderMorphics cohorts ended up back in north London, setting up QubeSoft. "One thing I didn't want to do was sit down and design an engine straight away because you never end up with anything new that way," Keondjian states. A year or so of experimentation followed before the technology called simply Q took shape.

"Back then [1999] I wanted to connect 3D with the Net," he recalls. "Obviously that's not a big market now since the dot.com bomb but I know it will come back. In the meantime, our focus is to get our clientside technology – a good game engine with some excellent tools – into developers' hands, while preparing the server."



Generic engine

In some respects that clientside technology, the QEngine, is a straightforward crossplatform game engine. It contains a rendering pipeline, scene management, a database for assets such as sounds, textures and geometry, an animation state machine for characters and the usual networking, sound playback and controller code. "I wanted an environment that was more generic than engines such as Quake," Keondjian says. "I wouldn't suggest using the QEngine for a racing game, but it could be used for any thirdperson game from a platformer to a shooter."

Interestingly though, its other major component, QStudio, is an integrated game development toolset. Much like Criterion's recent move to link its RenderWare engine with the RenderWare Studio, so QEngine and QStudio are designed to allow developers to get their content up and running as quickly as possible within the realtime environment. "You can have multiple artists using this tool so they are all building their world together," he says. "It's going to be a great productivity tool."

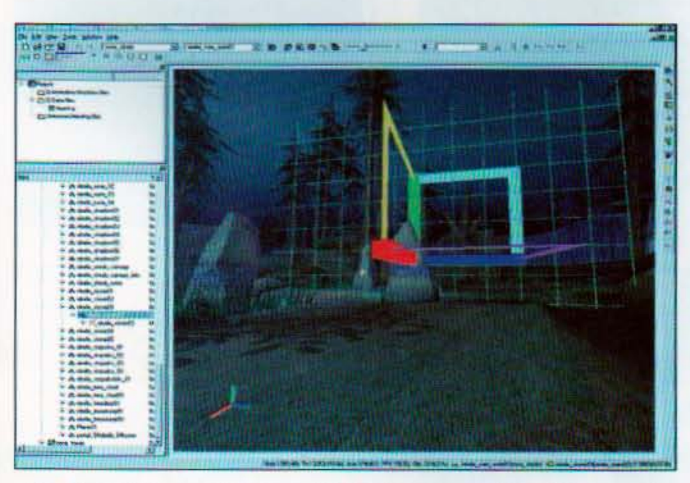
Already in use by its internal teams and partner Asylum, which is using the technology for three projects, QubeSoft will be releasing an alpha version of QEngine and QStudio in June. Perhaps the most radical aspect of the project however follows on from Keondjian's views on restrictive business models. "I hate the idea of companies who make their technology difficult to use so they can charge for support," he explains. QubeSoft's business plan also underlines his commitment to the open source community.



An integral part of the Q technology is QStudio, which is an integrated development environment allowing artists and level designers to work collaboratively to build game content quickly

"The PC version of the QEngine and QStudio will be available as a free download," he reveals. "I'm particularly hoping to encourage educational developers, as much of that software has a bad reputation through its low budgets and production values." QubeSoft will charge developers using the technology for console games however, although the proposed flat fee per title for all three platforms will not be unreasonable.

"I know we're the underdogs. Developers will have to compare what we can offer them with other solutions," Keondjian ends, adding with a grin, "Equally, I know Q is very useful for a certain type of application." And that's to say nothing of his grander plan that remains to be fulfilled.



QubeSoft's masterplan sees the release of its fully featured crossplatform QEngine, which is being used to develop games both with QubeSoft and its development partner Asylum

www.codemasters.com

Making it pay

Codemasters believes its Affiliate Program will be a financial winner for fan Websites, as well as driving online sales of its games

Codemasters always treated its Internet fanbase seriously but now it's taken this philosophy to the logical conclusion. Its new Affiliate Program allows fansites to generate revenue from the buyers they pass through to Codemasters' e-shop.

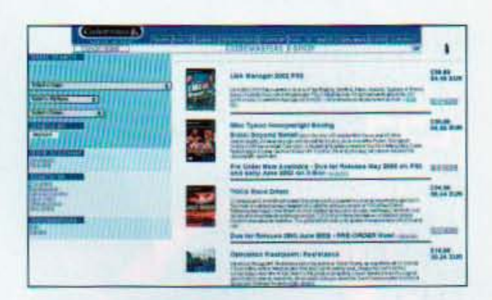
To get involved, all Website designers have to do is register and place a creative or text link to the official Codemasters Website. Each link is tagged with a unique code allowing Codemasters to monitor which Website sent a user to the e-shop, using their browser's cookies. In turn, Webmasters can track in realtime how many users they have sent to Codemasters' site, how many sales have been achieved and what commissions are due.

"We've been researching ways to reward Websites which have been loyal to Codemasters. Giving fansites, gaming sites and other complimentary Websites the opportunity to link back to our e-shop and earn a fee on each user that makes a purchase is a natural extension to the original fansite toolkit," explains **Nick Pili**, Codemasters' Internet marketing manager.

Launched at the end of last year, the fansite toolkit (see **E**95) provides fans with an archive of screens, movies and banners for Codemasters games such as *Insane*, *Severance* and *Colin McRae*.

"Relationships are king," says Pili, referring to the online world. "The success of games such as *Operation Flashpoint* has been driven by strongly supporting our online communities."

Pili also points out that fansites do have running costs such as paying for bandwidth. "We are aware that many fansites struggle with the finance involved in keeping these sites live," he says. "The Affiliate Program offers an excellent opportunity for Webmasters to be rewarded for their dedication."



The e-shop: Codemasters hopes the members of its Affiliates Program will be driving Internet traffic here

As for the commercial results for Codemasters, Pili is bullish, "Our sales will rise significantly as our Affiliate Program becomes more popular and Webmasters feel more comfortable sending traffic to our e-shop. The program allows us to drive quality pre-interested traffic to our e-shops. This is a true win-win situation."

Show us the money

Commercially, the affiliate deal is straightforward. "They currently get five per cent of all purchases that are made as a result of their site sending that user to us," says Codemasters' Nick Pili. "We do, however, plan to instigate a series of sales promotions for affiliates in the future and reward our top performing sites with higher commission rates." The minimum commission level for payment to an affiliate starts at $25 and is paid monthly. Any amount less than this will be carried over until it reaches the required minimum.

www.snsys.com

Fine Tuning

SN Systems' ProDG Tuner provides welcome relief for developers waiting to get their hands on Sony's Performance Analyzer

With Sony still struggling to ship its Performance Analyzer for PlayStation2 in the numbers developers require, Bristol-based SN Systems is filling the gap with its software-based ProDG Tuner. "We developed a little operating system that sits beneath the PlayStation2 kernel and creates a virtual shadow-image of the PS2 hardware," explains director **Andy Beveridge**.

Simply put, the tuner allows developers to see what's going on within the complex guts of the PlayStation2, notably how data is passed between the CPU (the Emotion Engine), and its two companion Vector Unit processors. It also shows the flow of information from these to the Graphics Synthesiser (GS).

This is important because, unlike other consoles, making a game work well on PlayStation2 requires getting its various processors to work in harmony. "In traditional computer programs, the main factor governing overall performance is how long a piece of code takes to execute," Beveridge explains. "This is more complex with the PlayStation2 because of the way the Emotion Engine interacts with other systems, which run at different speeds." This can introduce bottlenecks such as when the Emotion Engine is waiting for the subsystems to complete their tasks before it can start its next process.

For this reason, the ProDG Tuner provides a wealth of information for programmers including code execution time, the triggering sequences for the subsystems, how well the caches are working and other metrics such as pipeline efficiency. "You can see exactly when everything happens as well as rapidly browsing a game backwards and forwards frame-by-frame to look for the bad bits," Beveridge states.

And some of the results have been stunning, with one developer gaining a 20 per cent performance boost. Beveridge says using it also encourages programmers to be more open. "It helps you see your own mistakes, but you see the work of other members of your team up close as well," he says.

Tuner prize

The ProDG Tuner does have some limitations however. "Although we can see how the Emotion Engine interacts to drive it, we don't have good visibility of the way the Vector Units interact with the GS or how it's performing," he reveals. Furthermore, its usefulness may fade when Sony ships its Performance Analyzer. "Personally I think Tuner complements the Performance Analyzer very well," Beveridge continues. "We intend to integrate it with the Performance Analyzer though, to give developers the best of both worlds." As he points out, developers can never have enough information about what's going on in their code. And, unlike the Performance Analyzer which runs on Linux, the tuner runs on Windows, the OS of choice for most western developers. It's also cheaper.



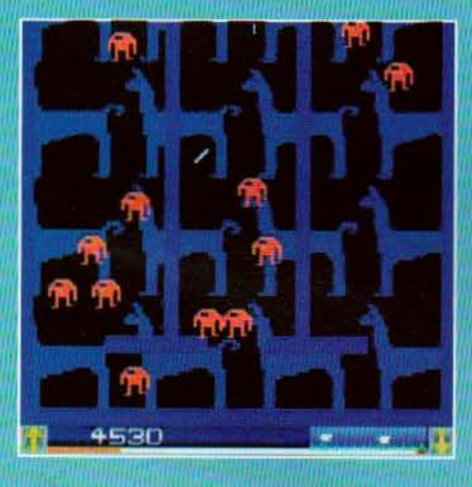
These complex graphical scenes provide developers with the information they need to improve their code

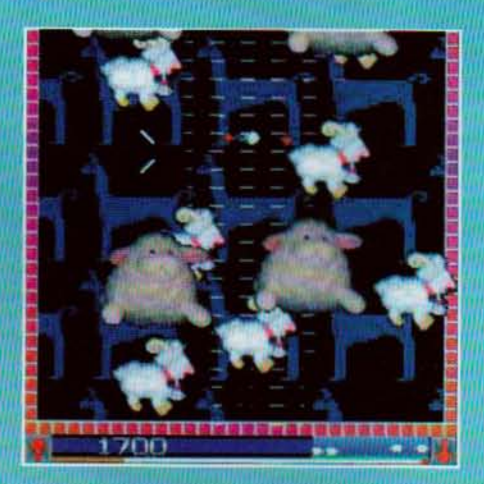
OUT THERE
REPORTAGE

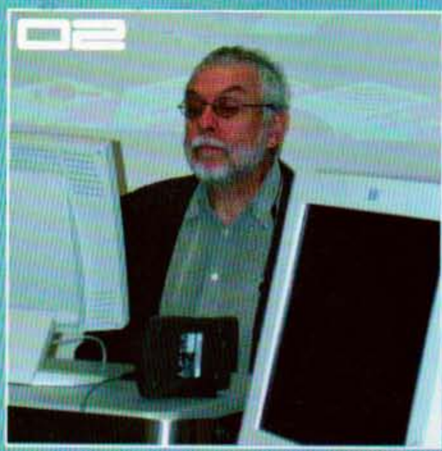


Unsubtle drug references and a llama with a big purple helmet? Ah, it's good to have you back, Jeff











Nolan Bushnell realises he's forgotten to bring any quarters, not that he can find the coin slot anyway

01 Return of the Yak

UK: Llamasoft is back. Well, actually, it's baaack, as fans of Jeff Minter and his curiously ovine way of thinking might have been able to predict. Following the disintegration of the Nuon, the bearded coder's decision to resurrect his homebrew software house caused shrill shrieks of joy from shareware fans the world over, and now they've an opportunity to invest in two brand new Llama-branded titles. *Hover Bovver 2: Grand Theft Flymo* is the sequel to a 1983 C64 cult classic, and stars Gordon Bennett as the put-upon Englishman whose only crime is the desire to cut his lawn. Well, that and stealing royal mowers, of course.

Deflex is another resurrected title, this time going all the way back to Minter's schooldays and stolen moments on a Commodore PET-2001. Players must place angular bats around the screen to destroy all the targets before time runs out. Both games contain all the motifs you'd expect from Llamasoft: bizarre cut-and-paste sprites, psychedelic spot-effects, and plenty of sheep. Playable demos are available for PC and PocketPC from http://www.llamasoft.co.uk, and the full versions cost £5 each, a small price to pay to fund the future of gaming insanity.

02 Pong Gong Phooie

US: Nolan Bushnell, arguably the University of Utah's most illustrious engineering graduate, was recognised by their School of Engineering in an awards ceremony held on April 11. The following day, Bushnell, whose past credits include the creation of the first arcade game and the founding of both Atari and Chuck E Cheese, presided over a classic games competition sponsored by Micron Technology, where engineering students competed at Infogrames' PC versions of *Crystal Castles* and *Asteroids*. Bushnell, who currently runs Uwink.com, tried his hand at *Crystal Castles* – a game that Atari released after he had left the company – but, distracted by reporters, 'King Pong' only managed a score of 21,000. Scott Little, a computer engineering student from Morgan, Utah, won the competition with a score of 286,000.

Soundbytes

"I drew the line at exposing my innocent young gamers to images of Margaret Thatcher. Hallucinogenic imagery and implied bestiality seemed mild by comparison"
Jeff Minter, in an interview at b3ta.com, on the imagery he rejected from *Attack of the Mutant Camels*

"Nintendo's spastic tribute to itself stands quite strong as one of the most engaging multiplayer games available for any console platform"
Gamespot's review of *Super Smash Bros. Melee*: sorry?

"A man allegedly gave cocaine to his five-year-old son to make him better at PlayStation games. Police say a cocaine derivative was found in the hair of the unnamed child from Milan. His 45-year-old father, named only as Mario, has been charged with possession of drugs and abuse"
A new angle on 'videogames are evil' from Ananova: no wonder Luigi had to fill in for the GC launch...

03 Rad Gravity

UK: The Nintendo-sponsored Sci-Fi Shorts competition is an annual script-writing competition created by the Sci-Fi channel and First Film Foundation to develop and produce high-quality science fiction short films for theatrical release in UCI Cinemas nationwide. This year's competition attracted over 750 entries, from which a panel of judges – including Terry Gilliam and Ridley Scott – picked James Moran's 'Cheap Rate Gravity', a cautionary tale of one man's blackmarket bid to save money on his gravity bill.

It's expected the film will be screened before inevitable summer blockbuster 'Men in Black II', along with 30-second promo spots for the Cube itself. Demo Cubes will also appear in UCI lobbies. Elsewhere, Nintendo kept up their launch publicity drive by showing the new video from imprisoned firearms felon Asher D inside one of their giant perspex cubes. Subsequent shows – featuring teenpop trash allSTARS and metal tryhards Soil – felt a little less appropriate to the voyeuristic incarceration theme.

04 Right, Left, Right… Damn

US: Having already carved out a reputation for unprecedented levels of interactivity and emergent gameplay, the seminal *Dragon's Lair* series is set to make the revolutionary leap to 3D later this year. It's also set to benefit from a range of action figures produced by manufacturer AnJon, designed to "extend the excitement of the legendary *Dragon's Lair* franchise." The figures will be released in August, to coincide with the release of the new title, with Dirk the Daring, the wizard Mordroc, the princess Daphne, and Singe the Dragon all set to appear. See http://www.digitalleisure.com for more information.

05 Cum on Feel the Noize

UK: Tactile Sound, familiar in an abbreviated sense to all importers of the Japanese *Rez* Vibrator pack, is now available to UK gamers via Clark Synthesis' ingenious flying saucer-style device. Distributed in the UK by Networx Group, and designed predominantly for a home cinema audience, it emphasises the natural percussive aspects of audio, something relevant to more than just fans of *Samba di Amigo*. Installation requires a little DIY – the device functions best when bolted through the frame of whatever you're going to be sitting on – but it's not overly complex, and shouldn't be too intimidating to those determined to mix the aural with the physical. Further information available by contacting enquiries@clarksynthesis.co.uk

Data Stream

Number of Xbox games in March US Top 20: **2**
Positions of Xbox games in March US Top 20: **19, 20**
Dreamcast games in current Japanese Top 50: **2**
Wonderswan Color games in current Japanese Top 50: **1**
Xbox games in current Japanese Top 50: **0**
Number of new mixes of *Pikmin* theme: **3 (Techno, Marche, and 'undokai')**
Worldwide PS2 sales in 2001/2002: **18 million**
PS2 sales forecast for 2002/2003: **20 million**
Sony revenue forecast for 2002/2003: **¥8 trillion (£42.7 million)**
Winning eBay bid for retrogaming collection of 70 consoles and 2,000 games: **$12,200**


Nintendo's cube installations have a voyeuristic feel. Forget 'Life's a game', what about 'I like to watch'?





James Moran, overjoyed winner of the Sci-Fi shorts competition, finds out that he can keep the t-shirt







The new *Dragon's Lair* figure sets. About as interactive – if not more so – as the real thing



Bolt this metal disc to the frame of your favourite chair, and turn it into the biggest rumble pak ever…


… or buy this instead, a chair with Tactile Sound built in: more expensive, but no DIY skills involved



Saturn bags, a must for dead-eyed obsessive Sega collectors, or for new fans going for a retro-chic thing





Big Robots *and* Lego? Could it be that Binary Asylum has found the perfect way to Edge's heart?





Hardcore Bit Char-G fans may find the karts underpowered, but upgrades are available



www.bitcharg.co.uk says both karts will cost around £50, but stocks are likely to be limited



Boxed, a tiny Mario kart like this could fetch up to £1 *million* from lazy Mario fans on eBay...



... out of the box, though – used and abused by thoughtless deputy art editors – it is worthless

06 Saturn in Popularity Shocker

Japan: As the green buds of multiformat prosperity appear, it's time for a spring-clean on a corporate scale. Sega's Game JAM event gave the software giant an opportunity to clean out its attic and to sell many now retro-cool items it hadn't been able to shift before. But the merchandise proved surprisingly popular; it appears that the miscellaneous paraphernalia based on old hardware doesn't just sell to the bitter hardcore, but also to new younger, cross-platform fans who want to show their respect for Sega's history. Hence this, a new line of Saturn Bags costing around ¥7,000 (£37), perfect for *PSO* players who haven't yet managed to find that much-missed dead-console mag.

07 Bricking your Keks

UK: Lego's recent acquisition of the merchandising rights to Fox TV's 'Galidor' series has borne oddly-named robot fruit. The Kek Poweriser is 30cm tall, comes with two different heads (Good Jens and Evil Gorm), and offers the kind of inter-toy audio communication expected in this post-Furby world. Its back also houses a small LCD screen, offering a variety of simple VMS-style games, and controlled via motion sensors in the character's body.

Most interestingly, though, the toy will respond to signals buried in the series' videogame, currently in development at Binary Asylum for PS2, GC, PC, and GBA. Drawing stock phrases from an internal library, it will offer the player advice on their current quest or, if evil Gorm's head is attached, distract the player with abuse. The game is expected to arrive in March 2003

08 Ain't No Karty Like a Char-G Karty

Japan: Tomy's liberal use of videogame licensing is popular among gaming otaku worldwide, and its decision to return to Nintendo's intellectual property was guaranteed to help it in the mini-RC wars. Nintendophiles will be delighted to see the two *Mario Kart Advance* 'Special Editions' of the Bit Char-G series (tin radio-controlled vehicles that charge for 45 seconds and then race for two minutes). The main competition comes from Takara's Choro-Q series, but that's unlikely to worry Mario and Yoshi, who come complete with miniature banana skins and red shells. Both are available from UK importer http://www.bitcharg.co.uk

Continue

Price Wars
"It's a great time to be a gamer"
Xbox consolatory offer
Not obligatory, but jolly good manners
Summer
And the new office doesn't smell of kebab

Quit

Seamus Blackley
For sending out the wrong message
Edge Is Biased
So who's been paying us this month?
Edge Meeja Appearances
Playing rentaquote's harder than it looks



09 52 Ways to Magic America

Ex-'Wired UK' journalist, James Flint's debut novel 'Habitus', made its mark decoding the interface between technology and 20th century culture. Obscure, intelligent and flawed, it promised great things. Which is why '52 Ways to Magic America' is such a strange follow-up.

Written with help from an Amazon.co.uk writing bursary (itself a lief motif), Flint takes a step back from his previous semi-surrealism. As suggested by the title, the book is about the travails and failures of Martin Quick, stagename Martin Mystery, as he attempts to make the jump from third on the bill at Blackpool Pier to the magicians' nirvana of Las Vegas.

It's certainly a well researched book; there's plenty of talk of fekes, thumbtips and well-worn copies of Jarretts. What becomes quickly clear however, is that Flint's concern with the main character of Marty is itself a sleight of hand. Unpleasant, prematurely bitter and ultimately irredeemable, Marty is unlikely to engender empathy with readers; surely a problem for any novel. But, of course, all the talk of magic is a slow burning metaphor building to when Flint reveals the ultimate comparison; technology. In this case, the start of the Internet boom of the early '90s, when all you needed to make millions was a URL and public school accent. The result is a book which is long on preamble and only tries to say something in the last 20-odd pages. It would have been better as a short story.

10 Game On: The History and Culture of Videogames

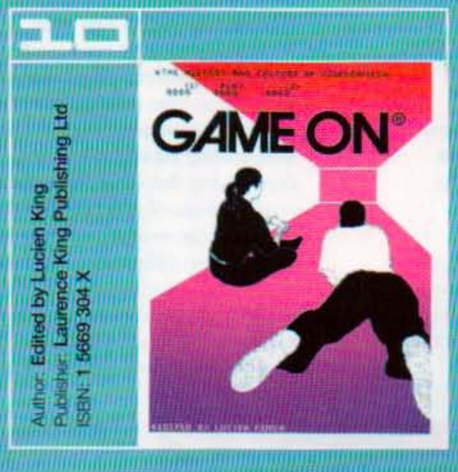
A videogame exhibition celebrating the broad appeal of the medium needs a book to reflect the growing cultural significance of the form. But while 'Game On: The History and Culture of Videogames' contains essays ranging from the burgeoning Machinima scene ('Telefragging Monster Movies') to the history of European game development ('Report from the PAL Zone') it's hard not to think that the book's diversity is its undoing. Some of the writing is embarrassingly weak. "Other popular games are sports games. Parents hate them! They are seriously addictive, you can be playing them for hours on end," enthuses Gautam Narang in 'I Love My Videogames'.

Thankfully there are a few gems to redeem matters. Texts by JC Herz, Henry Jenkins, Mark Pesce and Steven Poole illuminate where others merely explain or fill pages. Overall, 'Game On' is an attractively designed coffee table book. Dip in and select the wheat from the chaff and you'll have little to complain about. But those expecting a deeper more comprehensive historical approach may be left disappointed.

09

Author: James Flint
Publisher: Fourth Estate
ISBN: 1 84115 523 3

10



Author: Edited by Lucien King
Publisher: Laurence King Publishing Ltd
ISBN: 1 5669 304 X

11



Site: **Puzzle Bobble Online**
URL: **http://www.pbo.jp**

11 Website of the month

Shareware and freeware *Puzzle Bobble* clones are widely available across the Net, but this is special. Developed by Taito and, at the time of writing, free to download and play, *Puzzle Bobble Online* offers a beautiful port of the arcade classic, now with sixplayer competitive bubble duelling.

Lines are cleared in the standard way – link three or more of the same colour and they burst. However, rather than immediately passing the bubbles over to an opponent, they're now stored beneath your playfield. This means that when the time is right, you can unleash them on whichever of the five other players you feel deserves them the most. It offers the perfect mix of revenge and victimisation, and comes heartily endorsed by **Edge**'s inner bully.

12 Advertainment

Japan: Microsoft was so confident *Halo* would do well in Japan that it only started its *Halo* marketing campaign two weeks before the game's release with a tournament organised in four cities (with the final in Tokyo). The winner apparently receives a 'special belt'.



Message: "Imawano Kiyoshiro meets *Halo*." (Kiyoshiro-san is a famous Japanese singer.)



After careful aiming, the assault rifle wakes up.



"Pay pay pay paypaypaypaypaypaypaypay back!" screams our player as an entire magazine is emptied.



Magazine replaced, the enthusiastic firing continues.



Then, as quickly as it began, the din is over. The assault rifle regains its initial positioning...



... to reveal a bullet-holed 'X'. Voiceover: "It became crazy." Hardly combat evolved, though.



Finally, viewers are informed of the *Halo* tournament.

See it – "The GameCube is for kids" – feel the rush of pain and everything fades to red. Sticks and stones? Wrong. Words hurt. Each month RedEye receives feedback relating to his most recent piece; some of it is happy, and some of it is sad, and some of it is scratchily scarred across crumpled notepaper in what looks like blood, and so on.

Opinion columns cause that – it's perfectly natural, at least according to the Post-it note from the editor attached to RedEye's first death threat. Print has an arrogance that's hard to quantify; no way to argue back; just static, righteous type. Readers yell and readers shout, but it doesn't change what's written. Hence the threats. Thing is, though, recently they've stopped arriving. I mean, it's not RedEye's purpose to antagonise, but it seems that he might be mellowing. Come *on*, RedEye: C-, must try harder. The GameCube is for kids?

furry Pikmin tottering and giggling, and jelly and ice cream, except there wasn't any jelly *or* ice cream, but there might as well have been. It was great: simple, fun and bright, wholly like the console it was celebrating. There was an age restriction, but only because of the free bar. Free vodka.

Anyway, it turns out that *Super Smash Bros. Melee* on vodka isn't any more mature than *Super Smash Bros. Melee* on Sunny Delight; it's a bit more random and scrappy, maybe slightly more amusing, but it still makes you pine for *Super Monkey Ball*. Also failing to gain that magic, undefined 'maturity' were *Star Fox*, or *Luigi*, or any of the other games on show starring characters that have been designed to appeal to children. Why? Because the GameCube is for kids.

Shhh. *Resident Evil* doesn't balance the brightness, doesn't prove that Nintendo is gunning for an adult market. It's aspirationally adult – the sort

Magazine' is aimed at 11–17 year olds. It will carry features on Pokémon and wrestling, like a soft-porn lifestyle mag for those who can't reach the middle shelves. Nintendo's Cube ads – gorgeous, creative, not very childish – broke during a Robbie Williams documentary. The Box is to be rebranded in association with Nintendo for the GC launch. There are peripheral things – lenticular posters in bar washrooms, some cute bus branding – but the bulk of the money is going on targeting the early teens.

Which is fine. Recreation is self-indulgent by its nature, and most hobbies, unless they're sexual, illegal, or theoretically immoral, are childish. Or at least perceived as childish, because it's all wasting time – skateboarding, watching TV, tinkering with cars, whatever. They're perceived as childish because children have the most free time, and spend it trying to have fun; our lives are meant to drip, drip, drip away with faux-productivity, while they



REDEYE

A sideways look at the videogame industry

Life: it's a game for the under-18s

At least it can't be that he's become any more predictable, because words can hurt even when you know they're inevitable. Like this snippet, on the subject of the recent German school shootings, from BBC News Online. Quote: "Fellow students could only point to his love of heavy metal music and a taste for violent videogames as possible indications of darker traits behind a normal exterior." Unnamed sources are a classic journalistic device for expressing editorial opinion, but pretend those students exist. Pretend they perceive an interest in music and games as more disturbing than the fact that the killer was a member of two gun clubs, where he'd been trained to kill. Stupid. Don't have the stats to hand, but RedEye would guess that the number of copies of *Doom* involved in handgun killings last year was significantly lower than the number of handguns involved in handgun killings.

Anyway, sidetracked: the GameCube is for kids. RedEye doesn't have the numbers on GameCube-related homicides, either, but he has a feeling he might be about to become a statistic at the hands of the fanboys. Louder: the GameCube is for kids.

This isn't courting controversy for the sake of it. It's not even that controversial. RedEye spent last Friday at Nintendo's CubeClub. There were games, and sofas, and a big screen, and a machine that put photos of your head on six sides of a cube, and games, and dancing, and big bright Teletubby-style

of adult young teenage boys long for, guns and gore and nothing more mature than evisceration. Buy all the gut-rotten zombie franchises you desire, port *Soldier of Fortune*, *Night Trap*, *Erotica Island* if you want. Insist each game starts with a splash screen showing Nintendo's major intellectual properties

sexually violating each other in the most filthy, degrading way you can imagine, rename it the Babes'n'BoozeCube, and you won't change the fact that the machine's been created for kids.

For kids, right down to the purple casing. Not subtle purple, but bright, proud, grape-flavoured candy purple. The controller is perfect, and has a big bright green button and a smaller bright red button and a bright yellow joystick. You couldn't make it any more like a chew toy if you painted a smiley face on it and branded it Fisher Price. Once more: the GameCube is being built for kids. Boot up the machine with the Z button held down, and you'll hear the intro sound warp, and a child giggle. It's for kids. Say it. Go on. It's so liberating.

It hasn't been forced on Nintendo. Can't blame this one on piss-poor journalism, or a lack of education on behalf of The Casuals. It's what Nintendo wanted. The new 'Official Nintendo

waste theirs on videogames. Wasting it on the sort of games you get on the GameCube, because those games are the cheapest, and those games have the brand names and franchises, and because those games are the most instantly accessible. And because those games are the best, too.

Recreation is self-indulgent by its nature, and most hobbies, unless they're sexual, illegal, or theoretically immoral, are childish

Nintendo makes stunning games. It wants to take those games to the biggest number of people, so it makes them for the broadest demographic, and that means making them playable by children. The GameCube *is* for kids, but since any hobby is damned as childish by unbelievers, it doesn't matter. Regression is relaxation – hide in brightlight fantasy from real-world horror – so it's for us, too. Damn mottled black and faded green: our hobby is disparate, and while trying to indulge in every aspect might make you childish, it doesn't make you stupid. Gaming is young, but no more child-like than any other media; most GameCube games are only for kids in the same way as 'ET', 'Star Wars', and 'Toy Story'; they're for everyone. The rush fades. Words can hurt, but sometimes they taste like Calpol.

RedEye is a veteran videogame journalist. His views do not necessarily coincide with **Edge***'s*

Everything is quiet. Too quiet. A comrade wonders where the enemy is. I scan the room. Nothing. We prepare to move out. Then it happens. A blood-curdling, unearthly roar, a ghostly shape and a flash of blue in my peripheral vision, and a scream from one of my men. More roars and screams, and in mere seconds all of my marines have been gruesomely eviscerated. And what had I done about it in the meantime? Uh, actually, I ran and hid behind a box. That's where I am now, sweating, shaking, hoping they won't find me. Some hero. Some Master Chief.

This is what makes *Halo* the most thrilling videogame of recent years. Its other features are almost irrelevant. Take the two-weapon limit. That creates some speedy choice-making, but notice that they are blind choices. You never know which weapon will be appropriate around the next corner, unless you are already trying again. First time through, there is no tactical element to picking your guns, because you have no information on which to base any tactical thinking. And, by the way, let's not kid ourselves that two weapons is any more 'realistic' than the bristling arsenal that an FPS normally allows. A man can easily hold a pistol in each hand, have two more holstered at the thighs, and a rifle or two slung over his shoulder. Arbitrarily, *Halo* won't let you. It is a design choice with some interesting results, but it doesn't make the game realistic.

Nor are the aliens especially well imagined. A Hunter might look pretty frightening the first time you see him up close, simply because of his size, but he is basically just a standard grunting reptile. Eventually, moreover, the gaping chink in his armour just seems silly. You'd think they would be able to design something that fitted. And the Grunts? Personally I'm immune to that sort of comedy. Disturbing memories of Elvis in *Perfect Dark* threaten to flood back.

On the other hand, what *Perfect Dark* is so good at is very different from the strengths of *Halo*. Bungie's game does not boast anything like the semiotic depth of Rare's flawed gem: the splendid selection of gadgets, the wide variety of visual and cybernetic modes in which the player engages with the environment in *Perfect Dark* are unmatched. The laptop gun or the combat boost have no parallels in *Halo*'s universe.

In fact, *Halo* and *Perfect Dark* are so different that to call them both firstperson shooters tells you almost nothing. The generic term FPS has become almost useless, in the same way that 'platformer' can describe works as wildly different as *Taz* and *Ico*. FPS tells you about a certain mode of experiencing the gameworld, but it tells you nothing about what you're going to have to do when you're there, apart from shoot some stuff. Because the generic difference is this wide: *Perfect Dark* is a spy game, whereas *Halo* is a war game.

The generic twist that James Cameron gave to Ridley Scott's original 'Alien' film was the reason for his sequel's brilliance. 'Alien' was a horror movie; 'Aliens' is a war movie. It's a similar story with *Halo*, when compared to most of its generic brethren. What *Medal of Honor: Allied Assault* achieves only fleetingly, *Halo* achieves routinely throughout its world. It places you in a war movie. And it works that trick by creating an extraordinary sense of involvement. I've blinked in disbelief at the cunning of my enemies. I've laughed when one of my men kicked a prone alien and said, "How does it feel to be dead?" I've shouted at them to get out of the way of enemy grenades. And when I've let them die, I have felt bad. Guilty. This is its true magic.

For this to work so well, it is crucial that the death of your fellow soldiers does not signal game over, try again. It is vital that the game allows you to continue, fresh with relief that at least you survived, only to regret the lack of backup 20 minutes later. You can only regret things that are irreversible, just as you can only feel pity for the protagonist in a tragedy or a novel because his actions are irreversible. Irreversibility is the central melancholic fact of the human condition.

Now *Halo* does not insist on true irreversibility: if you like, you can restart the level and try to keep your marines alive this time. But that would take time and work. Once you have made your choice to plunder your comrades' inert bodies and keep going, that choice is at least irreversible for your current path through the system – which might last until the end of the game. And that pseudo-irreversibility is enough to create an emotional impact that is far more important, in terms of immersion in *Halo*'s world, than aesthetic complaints about miles of identical stainless-steel corridors, true as the latter might be.

In fact, *Halo* is reminiscent less of any other firstperson shooter than it is of *Advance Wars*. Every time an infantry unit gets blown away by some medium tanks in the latter, there's a pang. It's not because they're realistically rendered little fellows, and it's not because I'm enthralled by a narrative (the stories of both *Halo* and *Advance Wars* are merely rudimentary frames); it's because I messed up but must still fight on. I am responsible for the consequences of my actions. For all its beauty, a game such as *Ico* lacks this variety of emotional pull, because as soon as Yorda dies she is reincarnated back on the last glowing sofa. I am never given the opportunity to regret her absence. Her death is a routine annoyance, not a profound loss.

Clearly, to be fun and satisfying, videogames must always centre on you. But they are free to qualify and complicate that egocentricity. *Halo* is not just about you, and that is its genius.



TRIGGER HAPPY

Steven Poole

Regret: how Halo teaches us to be responsible

Halo places you in a war movie. And it works that trick by creating an extraordinary sense of involvement

Steven Poole is the author of 'Trigger Happy: The Inner Life of Videogames' (Fourth Estate). Email: trighap@hotmail.com

On March 28, 2002, a major announcement took place at Nintendo's Tokyo office. I suppose that many of you have already heard the news by now. Well, much to my surprise, I have been given the opportunity to develop Nintendo's famous *F-Zero* licence on the GameCube. Yes, I know this may seem like quite a simple decision but, believe me, I don't feel that comfortable. The *F-Zero* licence is such a big property and is remains one of Nintendo's most cherished brands.

I mean, a year ago, we were still competitors and such a project would have never been possible. But, Sega is now a multiplatform developer. Dreamcast is over and we are out of the hardware business. That has certainly cleared the way for big decisions like this. Mmm... but once again, I have this pretty strange feeling. Giving up the hardware business is so sad for a company such as Sega.

a very long time since I have worked on a driving game. Readers of this column will know that I have produced a lot of racing games in the past. These include *Daytona USA*, *SCUD Race* and *Virtua Racing* in the arcade, but also on consoles. So I have some experience with this kind of game and I think that this is the reason why Nintendo thought of Amusement Vision. Still, I have to admit, it has been a while since I touched this genre. To be honest, at the beginning, I was worried.

Of course, the main game design is my core responsibility. Thinking that Nintendo trusts my experience in the field of driving games – just thinking that – I feel this pressure in me. Already the development has started and I have suddenly recalled many sensations about where to start and what to do. What is for sure is that my previous experience in developing driving games is really going to help.

difficulty is not about working through the minute problems, no. It is more about how to deliver something great. Do you understand? At this moment, what I'm thinking is... yes, *F-Zero* is really good. But, this will not be good enough. To make something great is much harder. So, I would like the game to benefit from our experience and know-how.

"Because it is Sega, this has been possible," This is what I want fans to think when they are eventually able to play the game. And this is one of my biggest motivations right now. Basically, both arcade and consumer versions would share a common link, which would be the core factor – the game fun. The development is currently going this way and I am satisfied with what we have achieved so far.

However, I must be absolutely positive that I can deliver a great and enjoyable experience





AV OUT

Toshihiro Nagoshi, president, Amusement Vision

Rivals: for Sega it's all about the games

The fact this sadness is opening the door for this project is still somewhat amazing. But now that it has been decided, I only have one thing in my mind: to make it the best title possible. Every single day, I'm thinking about creating the greatest *F-Zero* title for Nintendo and *F-Zero* fans.

I would like to take this opportunity to give you a few early details about the *F-Zero* process. Regarding this project, Nintendo is the 'title supplier'. The developer in charge of the GameCube and the arcade versions is Amusement Vision, my company. Nintendo will release the GameCube version under its own brand, while we will do the same for the arcade version.

Now, concerning the development, I'm personally in charge of the game project design. But the development orientation and the game design suggestions are made by Miyamoto-san and Nintendo's *F-Zero* staff. That's it. In simple words, Nintendo is coordinating and Miyamoto-san is the project's general producer. Or something like this.

But again, I'm fully in charge of the game project planning (game design), directing the development and, of course, producing it. In a certain sense, it is a

You may wonder what kind of issues I think about first. They begin with simple ones such as, "How to start?", "Why are we starting with this?" and "How and to what level this feature has to be accomplished?" These points are filling my head all the time.

on the GameCube alone. Now there is another motivation and is part of this pressure I feel in me. In fact, I really love this game, *F-Zero*. Yes, this is huge. It's the number one reason why I accepted this project, much more than the business factor.

A year ago, such a project would have never been possible. But Dreamcast is over and we are out of the hardware business

At least when all these troubles begin to emerge, I will be able to handle them thanks to my past experience. I am able to say to myself, "Mmm, this problem is emerging because of this." Or, "Something is not yet fully completed or fixed so we will have to do this to remedy it." I can face up to the problems with a cooler head and not go down too many dead-ends.

Saying this sounds strange to me, but as I said before, thinking the project through, setting up the game ideas and putting them into form is one thing, but to make them reality is a long and very harsh process. So in that sense I'm really experiencing difficulties. But what I want to say is this: the

I really believe this is going to be a great game. Okay, you could reply, "Come on, isn't it rather early to say that?" Yes, I agree, it is early but I really believe the game will be special. Anyway, we are feeling very positive here at Amusement Vision and working with this outlook should help us to deliver a fantastic experience to users at the end.

Since the announcement from Nintendo, I have not been able to show a video of the game, but at E3 in May, I intend to do so. I hope you will like it. See you there.

Toshihiro Nagoshi is president of Amusement Vision, formerly Sega subsidiary Soft R&D #4

Hello to game fans all over the world. It's Lupin Kojima from 'Game Wave DVD'. This is the already the fourth time that I've written for **Edge**. Time goes so fast. Tokyo Game Life is quite some title, but really I just want to share some of my experiences of the videogames that I play or discover everyday in Japan. This time, I would like to speak about a title released by SCEI in Japan last December, *Ico*.

A game with a most original atmosphere, *Ico* is like nothing we've ever experienced before. Moving the controller, pressing the Start button, unable to distinguish right from left; I'm moving Ico, a young boy with horns. At the beginning of the game I was afraid. Yes, this vast environment, these high places, so high that you'd rather hide your eyes and not look at the drop beneath your feet. But that is not all. There is this heavy calm, the lack of sound, which creates a particular sound in itself, the sound of silence. I mean, I have played many games, but *Ico* represents a completely new experience.

In *Ico*'s world, you don't face monsters or zombies. There is no intention to surprise the player with tricks or traps. However, there is still this terribly frightening feeling. The environment is decorated with lights, shadows and colours. You can see the wind; you should not be able to, but you can.

Ico, the game's hero, is not heroic and does not possess any special powers. Well, he has horns. But anyway, his behaviour is so normal. He can jump over a crumbled passage, he can climb ropes, he can fall on his bottom with no serious damage. In the real world, he would be a normal, healthy, active teenage boy, with horns. He is nothing more than that, nothing special. Apart from the horns.

The castle where he has been imprisoned is incredibly... wide. That's the best word I can think of to describe it. Outside, the world is full of intense white light, while moving inside plunges you into torchlit corridors, darkness. Loneliness... I can't prevent myself from feeling that. There is no music, and there is none that would ever encourage you in this environment. No magic or special actions could help you either. The only things you hear are your own footsteps, your own breath. Putting my fear and loneliness aside, I begin to explore the castle.

And it is beautiful, so well designed. I climb on stairs, crumbling rocks, whatever can be used as stairs. I jump on a chain suspended from a ceiling and cross some emptiness to another place. I continue my journey, but, because of an error I've made, Ico is losing his balance and falling. He twists and manages to recover the situation, grabbing a nearby structure. That was close. I'm about to cry, literally. I'm feeling Ico's emotions. But, together, we resume our journey through the game, along paths that are everything but paths. What is hiding ahead? What is this pale stone castle? I can't stop myself from going deeper inside the game. I need to find the answers to these questions.

A little further inside, I find a young girl trapped inside a kind of cage, suspended from the ceiling. I thought I was alone, the only person in this world, so when I found someone else, I felt very happy. I brought the cage down, slowly, carefully, and freed her. Her name is Yorda. I don't understand her language, but I understand what she wants to tell me. I don't know how... I just feel I can understand her. How am I able to communicate with her? And while I'm thinking about this, suddenly, some shadows appeared from nowhere. They have no shape, no form but they are attacking Yorda. Grabbing her, taking her from me.

So, I stand in front of Yorda, fighting these shadows. It takes me time, but eventually they disappear, and when they do I learn to use the R1 button in order to communicate with Yorda. When I'm far away, I can call her with a loud 'Heeey.' When I'm close, I can grab her hand and we move together. I fight, and she follows. For her, I'll face any danger or trap. When she can't climb to a location I offer her my hand and pull her up. When I don't know how to pass an obstacle, I stay silent, looking at her. Even though we can't speak, somehow she always shows me the way. Why do I have to take her with me? Wouldn't it be easier to go alone? I never even thought about this. I couldn't, even though she never asked me and nobody gave me an order. I'm Ico. I will never let her down.

I don't know clearly what got me so emotional but my eyes are burning now. I can't stop them. It reminds me of when I was a child, my mother reading me foreign children's books. It reminds me of when I was older, reading hundreds of pages of fantastic novels from front to back in one sitting.

I need to stress this: *Ico* is one of the most intriguing titles I have ever held in my hands. It has a special charisma. Describing it briefly makes it sound like a simple action game, but playing it brings some of your deepest emotions to the surface. Fear, sadness, the comfort when you feel when Yorda gives you her hand.

These are emotions I have forgotten for a while, and this is not a manga, a novel, a movie or a TV series but a game. That's what makes me so sure that gaming's future is bright. I hope mine is too: I would like a girlfriend just like Yorda. She is so cute. Hmm. Maybe the reason I can't get a girlfriend is because I'm always saying things like that. Oh.

Right, three minutes have passed and my instant noodles are ready. While I'm moaning, "I would like a girlfriend so much," I'm preparing to sleep alone, under my desk again. Today once more I have to sleep in my office... deep in Tokyo Game Life.



TOKYO GAME LIFE

Lupin Kojima, sub editor-in-chief, 'Game Wave DVD'

Kojima-san gets all misty-eyed playing Ico

Ico has a special charisma. It sounds like a simple action game, but playing it brings some of your deepest emotions to the surface

Lupin Kojima is the sub editor-in-chief of 'Game Wave DVD', part of the Famitsu publishing portfolio

Edge's most wanted

Shinobi

Anyone who owned a Mega Drive in the early '90s will understand. It's been a long wait but, finally, one of Sega's classics reappears. Expectations are very high.



(PlayStation2) Sega

Legend of Zelda GameCube

More controversial than a Tory MP at a rugby club dinner, the next-generation Zelda can't fail to fill column inches before release. But will it be any good?



(GameCube) Nintendo

Warhammer Online

Sadly it's unlikely to recreate the sweaty atmosphere of the real thing, but will hopefully preserve its tactical interplay and combine it with real life politicking.



(PC) Climax

Metroid Prime

Proving that no news is bad news, *Metroid Prime* has been hidden behind closed doors for so long that fans are beginning to fret. **Edge** remains optimistic.



(GameCube) Nintendo

Console power struggle

And the increasing importance of second place

The Nintendo Famicom versus the Sega Master system, the SNES versus the Mega Drive, the N64 versus the PlayStation. Console wars have traditionally been contested by two competitors. Plucky Dreamcast aside, challengers have usually fallen quickly by the wayside. But can the market really support three next-generation consoles until the mid part of the decade?

With recent launch hype, and reports of large numbers of pre-orders placed by the hardcore contingent, it's easy to get caught up in the belief that everyone's going to be a winner. But don't forget: if you're reading this it's probable that you're in a minority of people who already have at least two of the consoles – or are at least seriously thinking about losing more space under the TV set. But the massmarket consumer is a different beast altogether.

Considering the number of titles being released across all formats (something which hardly ever used to happen in the early '90s) it's clear that publishers believe we're in for a three-way fight. But herein lays the problem: as more cross-platform games are released, the less attractive an individual console becomes. *Halo*? Sure, it's a superior game currently unavailable away from Xbox, but to the uninitiated it's just another FPS. Stand next to any Xbox pod in an EB store across the country and you'll hear the same comments: "I don't know why they bother bringing out more than one of these things," probably preceded by, "God! It's huge."

Massmarket consumers have never traditionally upgraded or moved across to another platform unless the technology delivers markedly different gaming experiences. Let's not forget that the migration from PSone to PlayStation2 was incredibly slow. Why would these people want to buy an Xbox or GameCube when games such as *Burnout*, *Tony Hawk's Pro Skater 3*, *Crazy Taxi* and *Dave Mirra Freestyle BMX 2* are almost identical on every format?

While the price reductions will serve to buoy the market to a certain extent it seems unlikely that massmarket punters are going to take to all three. How the spoils will be split remains open to debate but if Microsoft fail to deliver online games this year then it will certainly struggle against a £130 GameCube. Both companies have a great deal of work to do to secure second place. What is sure to be more interesting though, is what Sony's next move is going to be.



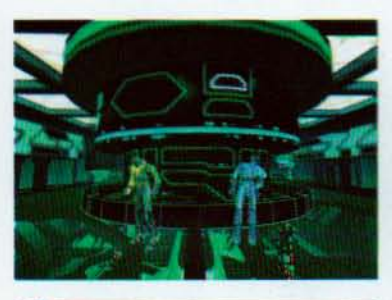







Tron 2.0

Twenty years on and the industry turns back to one of the true originals. But in a quick-save world, can this PC shooter break into new space?





Corrupted programs glow green. While this appears here to be the same as the Xbox, in-game it's actually more yellow. Diplomatic



For the first computer generation, 'Tron' is the very definition of an era-defining film, its mention enough to provoke a nostalgic sigh from all too many of the now 20-something videogame purchasing demographic. Clearly not for its plot or acting, this fondness is based upon its radical design – in the actual world created by Syd Mead and Moebius – and being the first example of spin-off games being created in conjunction with the film, rather than as an afterthought.

But when **Edge** travels to developer Monolith's headquarters in Seattle, it discovers that *Tron 2.0* is a considerably different beast. While a second film is in development, this is very much an unconnected enterprise – or even a leading edge, in a rare case of a game being used to build hype and awareness for a film.

Tron 2.0 is set 20 years on from the original movie, in which time the computer world of the original world has thrived, expanding in complexity as the information revolution continued apace. It also takes for granted the plot's high concept – that it's possible through a specialised technology to 'digitise' human beings into the digital world where they can interact with the entities of that plane – computer programs.

This technology has been acquired by an ambitious Internet startup company which plans to create an army of digitised Data Wraiths – humans of ill-intent placed into the grid – to gather information and, inevitably, rule the world. Interacting in the linear plot are a number of other factions, such as those warped by a growing corruption and the native countermeasure programs.

"Expect this nostalgic slice of futurism to result in one of the most strikingly designed games of next year"



The precise control of the disc is the primary game interaction – and it's most rewarding

But, like the original film, it's the outer life rather than the inner life of the characters that enthrals. The architecture, created with the latest Triton iteration of the Lithtech engine, manages to perform the trick of both totally updating *and* staying true to the unique look of the film inspiration. It bases the changes on the supposition that the complexity of architecture of a computer will lead to equal complexity of architecture in the game world. From densely packed PDAs to soaring data-portals, even to the old mainframes – where the simplified look of the film is lovingly recreated – *Tron 2.0* already presents some of the most unique vistas in the FPS.



Character designs, while clearly owing much to the look and feel of the original film, are very much an extrapolation from the design ethos. Consultation with Syd Mead was made to aid continuity

In terms of weaponry and the player's firepower, Monolith has striven to recreate the feel of the most striking of the film's icons – the Discs themselves. While firing lobs the projectile at opposing programs, curving aftertouch can be added by holding down the fire. If struck at the correct angle, it can ricochet off surfaces repeatedly to bounce around corners – though it will always eventually return to the user's palm.

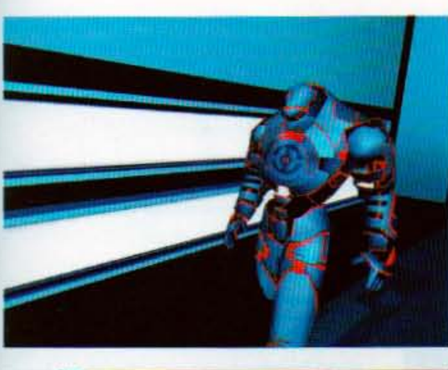
Alternatively, if not fired, it can used as a shield to turn aside incoming fire. This should allow the characteristic tactic of the film, of deflecting the opponent's disc, before striking back at the now defenceless foe with your own. As **Edge** has examples of architecture presented by designers, they – as an idle nervous reflex – lob the projectile around the levels for the simple pleasure of doing it. When other shooters are demonstrated to **Edge**, without exception they remain unfired. This is an indication that Monolith has nailed the required fluidity in this central weapon.

Central weapon, but not *only* weapon. *Tron 2.0* also features a unique weapons modification system, where four primary shapes – the disc, the rod, the ball and the mesh (ie 2D shapes) – can be altered and upgraded into different weapons, and then transformed back. For example, upgraded forms of the disc include a sports-style formation that allows increased after-throw manoeuvrability or an explosive one that shatters upon impact. This, as well as some light character improvement RPG elements and an unusually sophisticated inventory system – based on storing, optimising and packing subroutines – allows a considerable degree of player choice and customisation.

Were **Edge** to be of an optimistic bent, it would say that *Tron 2.0* had a chance of being the PC-shooter's answer to the synaesthetic disco-pulse of *Rez*. However, at the current stage of development – where actual second-to-second interaction is yet to be integrated – it's impossible to say whether it's going to be able to manage to sidestep the increasingly ingrained problems of the genre, such as over-reliance on quick-save as precognisance. At the least, expect this nostalgic slice of futurism to result in one of the most strikingly designed – in visual terms – games of next year.



Format: **PC**
Publisher: **Disney**
Developer: **Monolith**
Origin: **US**
Release: **Spring 2003**









Comparing this detail on the firewall level with the pulled-out view above right provides an idea of the scale *Tron 2.0*'s areas use to create an impression of an alien, electron-based world. Animated structures – such as the giant loops – add more atmosphere



The next-generation Lithtech technology allows massive expanses of high-polygon levels, such as the firewall (above)

Super bikes

Bar the disc, the secondary primary icon of the 'Tron' intellectual property are the lightbikes. They too appear in the game, though have yet to be unveiled – their appearance required considerable modifications of the engine to allow the required high-speed movement. Also Monolith has got original film designer Syd Mead to commit to designing a new lightbike for the game.

The House of the Dead III

Format: Xbox
Publisher: Sega
Developer: Wow Entertainment
Origin: Japan
Release: November (Japan), TBC (UK)

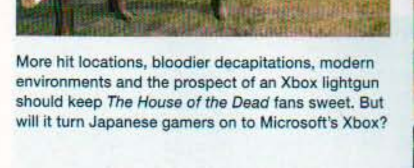
With a film tie-in already in production, Sega is keen to maximise the sales potential with another sequel of this gory lightgun title











More hit locations, bloodier decapitations, modern environments and the prospect of an Xbox lightgun should keep *The House of the Dead* fans sweet. But will it turn Japanese gamers on to Microsoft's Xbox?





When Sega released the first images of *The House of the Dead III* they caused consternation among the lightgun cognoscenti. The decision to adopt a more vibrant cel-shaded aesthetic was greeted with dismay by some. And like Link's new look on GameCube, it tended to divide opinion. But unlike Nintendo, it seems that Sega has bowed to criticism and changed back to the style which gamers have grown accustomed to. Perhaps the poor sales of *Jet Set Radio* had an influence.

It's a pity because any sniff of originality would have been welcome. New images suggest that apart from a bigger roster of undead creatures and more numerous enemies onscreen at one time it's business as usual for the popular franchise. Hopefully the transition away from gothic locales to more modern settings will generate a few more interesting gameplay scenarios and scripted events. Divergent routes are available and operate in the same way as in the first two games – shooting specific objects alters the movement of the camera, sending the player down an alternate path.

The game is expected to be much more bloody and there are more locations for the player to inadvertently hit (although limbs flying every which way may be spectacular, the head shot remains the most vital of targets). Although a singleplayer story option is present, the emphasis is firmly on the twoplayer mode. Specifications of a firstparty lightgun peripheral have not been announced but such a device seems highly likely.

Both Sega and Microsoft will be banking on the forthcoming *The House of the Dead* film to assist sales. Yet a budget of just $12m and an obscure German-born director, Uwe Boll, hardly inspire confidence. Whatever the quality of the film, it seems rather unlikely that another Sega sequel is going to significantly boost sales of the Xbox in Japan.



Shinobi

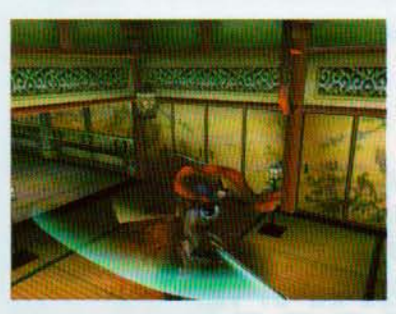
Format: **PlayStation2**
Publisher: **Sega**
Developer: **OverWorks**
Origin: **Japan**
Release: **Q3 (Japan), TBC (UK)**

Before Mortal Kombat and Onimusha were even a glint in a demon's eye, Shinobi was thrilling fans with its combination of mysticism and swordplay. Prepare for its return

Ninja's don't really belong in the public eye, but it looks like the bright lights of E3 – and the financial lure of resurrecting a brand-name – have persuaded Sega to bring back the *Shinobi* series, following a seven-year, post-Saturn absence.

The action is, as so often in videogames, set in a future gone bad, and fuelled by a quest for revenge. The Oburu clan is decimated by an earthquake that leaves Tokyo in ruins, but their hardship continues as an unseen enemy sets about eradicating the survivors. The player takes the role of Hotsuma, leader of the clan, and follows his mission to find out who or what lies behind the unremitting evil. Which means slicing demons. Slicing lots of demons.

The action should be familiar to all fans of the franchise; fast, frantic arcade slashing, although both magic and shuriken still appear in Hotsuma's armoury. Fantastically acrobatic moves – a requisite in a post-'Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon' ninja fantasy – also appear, including the ability to run along walls, but the most intriguing feature is the 'stealth dash'. This sends Hotsuma speeding towards his enemies, leaving faded movement trails, and allowing the ninja to link attacks and dispose of several enemies at once. It's also crucial in finding Shinobi's hidden areas and secrets, either by dashing through crumbling walls or dashing straight up them.









Mystical ninja

Expect the 1987 coin-op original's over-powered mystical attacks and boss battles (right) to be a staple of this belated update. Hopefully, the only thing that will make the player scream is the oncoming hordes of demons, rather than a troublesome 3D camera, which has plagued many an update of a much loved 2D treasure. And let's hope Sega keeps any wolves locked up, too.











Magic use will be accompanied by lurid rings (right), while physical powers will stretch to running across vertical surfaces 'Crouching Tiger'-style (top). Expect the swordplay to be incredibly bloody (above)



Pillage

Format: **GC, PS2**
Publisher: **TBC**
Developer: **Zed Two**
Origin: **UK**
Release: **Q4**

Self-funding pays off for Zed Two, granting the freedom to create an original and quirky interpretation of turn-based strategy norms

Sadly, it comes as no surprise to find that Zed Two has funded the first half of the development of *Pillage* itself. Given the almost pathological risk aversion of most major publishers, who seem to expect no more ambition from developers than a desire to make 'a game like x but better,' the idea of something that doesn't fit easily into a conservative release schedule must have been a difficult one to sell.

Fortunately, freedom from publisher interference has allowed the developer to produce a lovingly crafted, solidly coherent, character-rich title that, though it might lack an obvious marketing hook, has the potential to offer a compelling and accessible experience.

Players control a team of five characters or more, from a thirdperson perspective. The action is controlled in a series of turns, during which players can manoeuvre their characters, and attack opponents. One of the ways in which the game differs from most turn-based strategy titles though, is that attacks are carried out by means of a targeting system reminiscent of *Super Monkey Ball*'s Monkey Bowling. Thus, for line-of-sight weapons, a series of moving reticles are stopped to create a crosshair, or, in the case of area-effect weapons, to determine direction and distance. It's even possible to apply aftertouch using the trigger buttons.

Another way in which the game differs from the standards of the genre is that the thirdperson perspective allows a line-of-sight AI system, which, combined with a deformable terrain model, means that no two games are the same. And, surprisingly for a western developer, an almost Japanese level of effort has gone into the backstory and the creation of a convincing cast of characters. Indeed the story, which has been co-scripted with Digitiser's Paul Rose, was completed before the 19 singleplayer missions were chosen, and a further sense of immersion should be derived from the soundtrack, which is being created by the venerable Tim Follin.

Although it would be easy to describe *Pillage* as a turn-based strategy game for those who don't like the stat-heavy norms of the genre, it would be slightly unfair. The combination of thirdperson perspective, neat AI, deformable terrain and tactile interface has the potential to add up to something wholly original, and a multiplayer head-to-head mode could easily find itself installed as the party game of choice. And with the preview version already looking substantially polished, there's plenty of time for fine-tuning.











Using Criterion's RenderWare tools has allowed Zed Two to get a remarkably polished version of *Pillage* up and running in a relatively short amount of time. Particularly noteworthy is the degree of characterisation, with each member of your team possessing a unique special ability – such as infrared vision, or healing

Pillage is almost an object lesson in interface design. A smooth icon-driven rotating menu controls the actions of each character, while the weapon targeting systems could constitute a game in their own right







Track Record

In more recent times, Zed Two's reputation has been built upon the development of the two watery puzzlers, *AquaAqua* and *Wetrix*, but Ste and John Pickford both started out as bedroom coders, building up an impressive softography on successive generations of hardware over the years. In particular, the two brothers have proven their ability to work with Nintendo hardware, having developed titles such as *Ironsword*, *Wizards & Warriors 2* and cult classic, *Solar Jetman*, on the NES, and *PLOK!* on the SNES.

Rygar: The Lost Adventure





Format: **PlayStation2**
Publisher: **Tecmo**
Developer: **In-house**
Origin: **Japan**
Release: **Q4**

An old franchise rises again like a horde of poorly animated stop-motion skeletons: will Tecmo make good use of its cast of thousands, or will the game be hit and myth?

Tecmo's most famous resident is *Dead or Alive 3* creator Team Ninja, but the company also comprises two other in-house teams. One is in charge of new online developments; the other, whose recent work includes *Monster Farm*, *Gallop Racer*, *Project Zero* and *Bakuretsu Soccer*, is internally designated as the 'Creative Division' and led by executive officer Satoshi Kanematsu. It was Kanematsu-san's decision to push the company more towards the US market, and to do this by resurrecting one of Tecmo's oldest franchises: *Rygar*.

Superficially similar to *Onimusha*, except for the use of polygonal 3D backgrounds, *Rygar*'s basis is in Greek mythology, meaning many of the enemies encountered will be familiar to students of Homer and fans of Ray Harryhausen's epic films. Rygar is the main character, and his only weapon is his shield. While he uses it as a weapon in a variety of ways, the most common is the yo-yo-style attack, where it spins out in the direction of an enemy and returns. Other attacks and features – such as the hook attack, which allows you to access out-of-reach areas – have to be unlocked after encounters with the game's bosses. Defeating them is easier once you've mastered the game's unspecified numbers of combos, as will fighting the inevitable hordes of weaker foes.

Development of the game has, unsurprisingly, involved lots of research around Harryhausen's work, and visually the game represents something of a departure from Capcom's signature darkness, with bright and colourful imagery that fits with the sunny Grecian environment. Each stage is themed around a different Greek god, and while the number of stages hasn't been confirmed, it's expected that *Rygar* will offer around ten hours of fictional historical action.

The controls are simple, apparently focusing on a single button, a move which game director Takao Ando hopes will produce a non-stop action feel throughout the adventure. It's the first title with worldwide ambition to emerge from Tecmo's Creative Division, but it won't be the last; more attempts on the US market are expected during 2003.











Survival horror influences are obvious from the screenshots, but perhaps just as relevant are comparisons with *Frak!*, Aardvark's also-gorgeous ancient neanderthal platformer, in which the player takes the role of a yo-yo wielding caveman. Hopefully *Rygar*'s dynamic depends significantly less on pixel perfect jumps



Battle Engine Aquila

Format: **PS2, Xbox**
Publisher: **Infogrames**
Developer: **Lost Toys**
Origin: **UK**
Release: **September**

Previously in **E**107



After the strangeness that was MoHo, Guildford-based Lost Toys returns with a 3D shooter and an emphasis firmly on classic arcade values









Midway through the first press demonstration of *Battle Engine Aquila* the director of Lost Toys, **Jeremy Longley**, makes a curious statement. "We were tempted to put an apple with a worm in it – perhaps with a hair on it. But we can live without that." It's a reference, of course, to Peter Molyneux's early demos of *Black & White*. You can tell the comment is not really a meant as a jibe, it's more that these ex-Bullfrog/EA employees are keen to let their game do the talking rather than some piece of extraneous fluff.

Lost Toys' small team structure and philosophy had a direct influence on the game's inception. **Edge** gets the impression that boardroom meetings have been left far behind. The team later reveals that the idea was cooked up over lunch in the pub. You can imagine the scene: talk of thousands of foot-soldiers fighting an epic battle against armoured tank divisions and gargantuan mechs. Salt shakers and ketchup bottles moving around the table correspondingly.

But the game is grounded in old-skool simplicity. "The high concept is ambitious, but we want it to be immediate, so you know exactly what you are doing," states Longley as several tank units explode onscreen. In essence, *Battle Engine Aquila* is an epic war played out between two rivals, the Muspell and the Forseti. Strangely, the only game which seems to come close to *Battle Engine Aquila*'s dynamic is *Dynasty Warriors 2*. Like Koei's historical wargame you take charge of a single powerful protagonist in the midst of huge conflicts. You can go berserk destroying every enemy unit in sight or use a more cerebral approach by targeting more sensitive areas of the enemy's forces, thus changing the flow of the conflict.

Troops flow through breeches you have created and your own airborne divisions and tank units react intelligently to the vicissitudes of each skirmish. Importantly, nothing is scripted. In truth, the tactical elements do not seem as complex as **Edge** might have hoped, but the team has self-consciously avoided creating an RTS out of an FPS.

Your mech's ability to transform into a land or ground vehicle allows for flexibility and brave excursions deep behind enemy lines – though water must be avoided by leap-frogging across battleships or other structures. The addition of a cloaking device for the latter levels will also offer stealth opportunities to a game with the emphasis firmly on pure action.



Along with red and blue colouration the rivals' sport a different aesthetic: one is curved, the other angular



Quart into a pint pot

Lost Toys believes that there should be few problems in optimising the code for the PlayStation2 version (above). Although both versions were on display the Xbox code was smoother and boasted more detailed textures. At least the team believes the PS2 version should provide better explosions because of its superior out fill rate.







Like *Gun Metal* (p98) the player's craft can transform into a land- or air-based vehicle. Directing the flow of your troops can be achieved by destroying enemy forces. The detail remains impressive throughout

Nobunaga's Ambition Online

Format: **PlayStation2**
Publisher: **Koei**
Developer: **In-house**
Origin: **Japan**
Release: **Summer/autumn (Japan), TBC (UK)**

Koei helps spearhead Sony's drive for networked PlayStation2 content with an online version of a popular period franchise

Given its historical setting, which will be familiar to western gamers via the likes of *Onimusha* and *Kessen*, *Nobunaga's Ambition Online* resembles a networked version of *Dynasty Warriors 2*. After Square's *Final Fantasy XI* and Bandai's *Gundam Online*, it's the latest important franchise to get an online update, in a bid to satisfy Sony's appetite for the sort of networked content that will transform its console into a home hub device. It's also a significant title for publisher, Koei, which, having recently opened offices in the region, is hoping to tap into the lucrative online gaming market in South Korea and Taiwan.

Taking the form of a MMRPG, you are able to choose from seven careers for your character (samurai, monk, priest, diviner, ninja, blacksmith and healer), and adventure individually or with other players across a large world, populated with an ecology drawn from traditional Japanese folk tales.

Although it is compatible with a narrowband connection, Sony is no doubt hoping that it will encourage PlayStation2 owners to take advantage of its imminent broadband services. No pricing details have been finalised, but the game is set to enter beta testing in summer, with a general release to follow in autumn.

Koei has carved an impressive niche in Japan for developing hugely popular, historically-themed titles. *Nobunaga's Ambition* is thus vitally important for Sony's realisation of its broadband strategy for PS2, joining titles such as *FFXI*





In terms of gameplay the game is reminiscent of the publisher's own *Dynasty Warriors* titles, with players able to join teams or operate individually

Super Monkey Ball 2

Format: **GameCube**
Publisher: **Sega**
Developer: **Amusement Vision**
Origin: **Japan**
Release: **TBC**

Still no games for 'Inner City Sumo' or 'Youth Hostelling with Chris Eubank', but relax: at least one of Alan Partridge's ideas is heading to GameCube

The lack of (commercial) success for *Super Monkey Ball* was a disappointment to both Amusement Vision and to **Edge**; it's still the essential GameCube title, eclipsing Nintendo's in-house efforts with exuberance, charm and sustained desire for replay. The meagre sales – at least, in comparison to what the title deserved – were attributed to the lack of a Story mode.

That criticism has been addressed in the unexpected sequel, with some kind of evil about to debut in Nagoshi-san's previously-pure simian paradise. Crucially, *Super Monkey Ball 2* won't be appearing in the arcade, allowing Amusement Vision more freedom to design the game for home consumers, particularly with regard to the level structure which means rolling through ten themed zones and 150 new mazes.

The minigames, such a crucial part of *Super Monkey Ball*'s appeal, have been taken even further for the sequel. Six new events appear – Monkey Soccer, Monkey Boat Race, Monkey Baseball, Monkey Shooting, Monkey Dogfighting, and Alan Partridge's much-wanted Monkey Tennis – and the original ones have been expanded to include new courses and objectives. Among other improvements, Monkey Target has a formation flying mode, Monkey Bowling has crazy alleyways, and Monkey Billiards offers eight ball.





It's not clear how Monkey Soccer will work, but it's unlikely to deviate much from the simple controls of the original game. **Edge** can't wait



While the complexity of the environments has been increased for the sequel, the imagery, thankfully, proves just as colourful and surreal

Tiny Toon Adventures: Defenders of the Looniverse

Format: **PlayStation2**
Publisher: **Swing Entertainment**
Developer: **Treasure**
Origin: **Japan**
Release: **June**

The brilliant SNES versions of the kiddie licence were popular around the **Edge** office, but can this next update possibly match up?



Quake III Arena has nothing on the anarchy of *Tiny Toon Adventure*'s Toonmatch mode. Rockets, bombs and pieces of fruit can be used as devastating weapons. But, unfortunately the controls seem to be a little sluggish at present

It's a Treasure game, so some degree of novelty and invention is expected. The company – best known for its magnificent back catalogue of 2D games, including *Gunstar Heroes*, *Radiant Silvergun* and *Bangaio* – has failed to make a major impact in three dimensions. *Freak Out* aside, the company's star is in danger of falling if matters don't improve.

Although aimed at tykes ("suitable for ages from three years" says the press release) **Edge** had hoped for a bit more of the spark which made the SNES' *Tiny Toon Adventures: Buster Busts Loose!* so much fun. *Tiny Toon Adventures: Defenders of the Looniverse* is everything you would expect from the licence: vibrant, frantic and, at times, baffling. Gameplay consists of two main modes: Adventure and Toonmatch. Up to four players can participate in either. The first consists of a series of stages which must be cleared by throwing bombs, pummelling enemies, even riding rafts. While the second is traditional arena combat, spiced with power-ups as extraordinary as riding rockets into your opponents.

It's possible that many members of the Konami team responsible for the SNES version worked on this 3D iteration, but somewhat sluggish controls need to be improved for the fun factor to intensify.



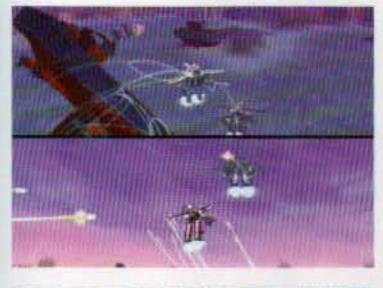


Adventure mode can be played through with up to four players, but somewhat annoyingly those who get ahead must wait for friends to catch up

Robotech: Battlecry

Format: **Xbox, PS2**
Publisher: **TDK Mediactive**
Developer: **Vicious Cycle**
Origin: **US**
Release: **Q4**

At long last, it looks like a videogame to do justice to Harmony Gold's seminal anime localisation job





Although gameplay details are scant at this stage, the inclusion of a splitscreen arena mode is encouraging and combat is likely to be histrionic



Robotech boasts graphics that are quite simply among the most impressive that **Edge** has yet seen on next-generation hardware, with vividly coloured cel-shading doing vibrant justice to the original Harmony Gold animated classic

As the series that kickstarted the global spread of Japanese animation, a videogame based on 'Robotech' has been a surprisingly long time coming. Although an N64 title was once scheduled, it never quite made it to release, so TDK Mediactive's decision to pick up the licence is a welcome one – particularly given that *Battlecry* boasts some of the most astounding, cel-shaded, graphics yet seen on next-generation hardware. If the game mechanics and structure match the sumptuous visuals, it's more than likely to do justice to the magnitude of the licence.

The original Harmony Gold series actually consisted of three separate Japanese animated series, each with its own distinct feel. *Battlecry* takes place during the Macross saga period, though in a parallel storyline to the series itself, giving the game an urban feel. Nevertheless, characters such as Rick Hunter make welcome cameo appearances, and you're able to utilise all three transformable modes of the Veritech Fighter – each of which has distinct capabilities. Combat encounters against a giant alien race, called the Zentraedi, are expected to be fast, fluid and suitably bombastic, and the game is rounded out with a multiplayer combat arena mode.



Lamborghini

Format: **Xbox, PS2 , GC**
Publisher: **Rage**
Developer: **In-house**
Origin: **UK**
Release: **Spring 2003**

Five years ago, Edge previewed an N64 Lamborghini title, developed by Titus. Now the licence has passed to Rage, and its attempt is looking significantly less diabolical...



The show-off's favourite, the Replay mode, will play a significant part in making playboy drivers covet the cars that aren't in their collection

Rich **Edge** readers tired of smashing up their luxury cars in illegal road races will be delighted to hear that Rage's upcoming Lamborghini licence is going to support multi-machine multiplayer. The Xbox version will have system-link play for up to eight boxes, while fourplayer splitscreen competition will be available for those without the luxury of a home network. The singleplayer game offers three modes of play; Test Drive, Arcade (with a number of competition styles, including point-to-point racing, an overtaking challenge and an eliminator mode in which anyone finishing last in a race is eliminated), and Championship.

In Championship mode, the player competes in the Lamborghini Millionaire's Championship, with the aim of unlocking tracks and winning more cars; after all, who wants to drive an entry level Lamborghini forever? Other competitors have AI tailored to their personalities; Pop Stars, Dot Com Millionaires, and Mobsters. Locations are just as varied, with nine environments (including Las Vegas and the Italian Alps) and 40 tracks. While the selection of cars is restricted, naturally, to Lamborghinis, there are 20 models to collect, and rare cars can be gambled and traded between players for that extra competitive bite.



Rage is proud of the weather effects, particularly the rain, which causes splash effects as well as full hazy reflections from the tarmac

Warcraft III: Reign of Chaos

Format: **PC**
Publisher: **Blizzard Entertainment**
Developer: **In-house**
Origin: **US**
Release: **Q2**

Finally, Warcraft III looks like it's close to release, with the hallmarks of the series apparently intact

Over the lengthy course of its development, the original plans to add an RPG dimension to the *Warcraft* series appear to have been slightly reined in. Instead Blizzard has focused on making basic improvements to the magnificently balanced formula of *Warcraft II*. For a start, the simple things have been looked after: online community management benefits from the introduction of anonymous player matching, in a bid to decrease fraudulent player rankings; and several profiles can be set up on one PC to attend to the needs of (Korean) Internet café gaming.

But when it comes to the game proper, Blizzard could be criticised for offering little more than a refined version of *Warcraft II*. The original bitmap aesthetic is transferred intact to a world of polygons; subquests add meat to missions; two new player races are introduced; and once again the game will ship with a comprehensive World Editor suite of tools; but the fundamentals remain the same. However, the signs are promising that the developer has also maintained the graceful learning curve of the original. And if Blizzard does get this right, there's every chance that *Warcraft III* will eclipse the horrible profusion of substandard RTS titles, returning the series to the top of the pile.



Warcraft III isn't likely to be a radical departure from the wonderfully refined formula of other titles in the series, but it does appear that Blizzard has maintained the judiciously balanced reward curve and ease of use that characterised *Warcraft II*





As with *Warcraft II*, a comprehensive editing toolset is being shipped with the game, which will undoubtedly extend the game's variety and range



Neverwinter Nights

BioWare's latest game attempts to add to the company's reputation for singleplayer excellence by throwing in an extensive multiplayer mode, a suite of content creation tools, and realtime refereeing of multiplayer sessions

Baldur's Gate II: Shadows of Amn initially appeared to be an unlikely candidate for adoption by the mod community. After all, it requires a significant investment of time to play through the singleplayer game alone, due to the sheer scale with which BioWare has evoked the 'Dungeons & Dragons' universe. More importantly, the developer didn't exactly make things easy for would-be world builders. Nevertheless, it was still the recipient of several sizeable, and indeed, high quality, expansions produced by a fervid fan community.

"We didn't really think it was feasible," remarks joint CEO, **Greg Zeschuk**, before **Ray Muzyka**, also joint CEO, continues, "We didn't make anything easy for them to do. There were no open file formats, there were no tools, there were no notes or documentation. We didn't mind it, but we didn't facilitate it." It's interesting then to imagine what this hardcore following will make of the company's latest excursion into the Forgotten Realms campaign setting. For in addition to providing the expansively epic, intricately weaving singleplayer game that BioWare fans have come to expect, *Neverwinter Nights* will also ship with an astonishingly easy-to-use set of development tools with which players can create their own adventures. What's more, in a move that has the potential to redefine the videogame RPG (and perhaps lay to rest the horrid memory of *Vampire: The Masquerade*), it will also be possible for players to referee multiplayer game sessions in realtime, making any necessary tweaks and adjustments as they go.

Format: **PC**
Publisher: **Infogrames**
Developer: **BioWare**
Release: **Summer**
Origin: **Canada**



Although BioWare has dispensed with its Infinity engine, the 3D graphics supplied by the new Aurora engine are just as detailed and attractive



This desire to provide such a comprehensive experience perhaps explains why the game has taken so long to develop. Stemming from the desire to improve upon *Baldur's Gate II* (no small feat in itself), and starting with the development of a multiplayer element to match the always impressive singleplayer aspect of the company's previous titles, BioWare first started work on *Neverwinter Nights* back in August 1997. "I don't think anyone else would have done *Neverwinter*, and I don't think anyone would have done it to the same scale as us," declares senior producer, **Trent Oster**. "We've spent a lot of time and a lot of energy on this game. I think the concept is interesting and I think the level of technology and tools and everything we've put into the game will result in a compelling experience that a lot of people will enjoy." It's certainly an ambitious title, and Oster, Zeschuk and Muzyka are united in emphasising





Neverwinter's interface design is radically comprehensive, allowing for an undaunting interpretation of the 'D&D' ruleset

the title's importance to the company.

After such a prolonged gestation, the recent breakdown of relations with Interplay, which had been set to publish *Neverwinter Nights*, must have been hard to stomach. Particularly because Interplay was the holder of the 'Dungeons & Dragons' licence, threatening the availability of a game universe that had proved a significant pillar in BioWare's creative output. "We did actually talk seriously about what it would take to convert the game into our own rule system," explains Oster. "I felt that third edition 'D&D' was core to the whole concept, so I fought like hell to keep it 'D&D' and everybody kind of agreed with that. It's what our fans expect. So if we were going to go with another publisher it had to be Infogrames [which also held a 'D&D' licence]." Fortunately, the new relationship seems to be working well, and the 'D&D' licence is intact.

Indeed it's looking likely that the developer has once again utilised the licence to bring a complex gameworld and an involving narrative and quest structure to life. As well as supplying a rich imaginative framework and a coherent set of gameplay logistics, the 'D&D' licence also provides a ruleset that western gamers are familiar with – on a subconscious level at least – due to its historic influence on western videogame design. For although the developer is keen to emphasise the toolset and DM server client multiplayer technology, it's not scrimping on the singleplayer experience.

As Muzyka explains, "We identify play patterns and we try to include as many of those play patterns as possible. We see the interface as simultaneously the most and least important thing in a game. It's the most important if you notice it, because that means it's in the way of getting to all the good bits. And it's the least important if it's really good because then nobody notices it." Thus in *Neverwinter Nights* it's possible to use customisable quick icons, a radial right-click menu system, keyboard shortcuts, standard menus, or a combination of these to control the action.

Significantly this self-evident skill in the design of control interfaces has also been brought to bear on the Aurora toolset. Which is good news for budding DMs, because otherwise the majority of players might have been swamped by what is essentially the exact same toolset that BioWare has used to create the game. "*Neverwinter* is a full programming language at its heart," states Oster. "The toolsets have access to pretty much everything in the entire game; you can customise so many things." And while there will no doubt be a hardcore element that will dive straight in to tinker with the finer points of the scripting language, mere programming mortals will be catered for by means of an extensive selection of wizards that automate and simplify almost every conceivable task.



Budding DMs will be able to use exactly the same character models and environment tilesets that the *Neverwinter Nights* team has employed with such panache to create the game itself

"With the singleplayer game, the freedom engendered by the Aurora toolset, and the promised community support, Neverwinter Nights seems set to eclipse the competition"

Starting out with an impressively engaging tutorial level to introduce players to the rules and interface, the game spans five chapters and some 60 hours of gameplay, set against a backdrop of political intrigue and heroic deeds. The number and scope of side quests, and a fairly dynamic structure supports a degree of emergent gameplay of which Warren Spector would be proud. And though it's a shame to see the end of the sumptuously detailed isometric settings engendered by the Infinity engine (used to good effect in the *Baldur's Gate* titles) the new 3D Aurora engine introduces a greater amount of graphical versatility.

The most striking feature though, is the way in which adroit design and a painstaking approach to interface design shields the player from the significant levels of complexity within the game. Borrowing from a variety of sources, from Windows applications to the *Warcraft* series, BioWare has synthesised them into an elegant and extensive control system. Zeschuk admits to implementing a few camera controls borrowed from *Dungeon Siege* just a few weeks before demonstrating the game to **Edge**, and it's even possible to use the FPS WASD scheme to move your character.

Even **Edge** managed to blunder along and produce a simple section of lava-filled dungeon, complete with marauding bands of vampires and an NPC encounter in the space of half an hour. Such ease of use is partly because the toolsets use a Windows-based interface that will be familiar to any users of applications such as Word and Excel. Players simply choose a tileset, paint the terrain, place encounters with stock (or customised) monsters and NPCs, and set up dialogue trees with an incredibly intuitive conversation editor. As Oster points out, it's even possible to set up a range of specific features, such as

Orc-estral manoeuvres in the dark

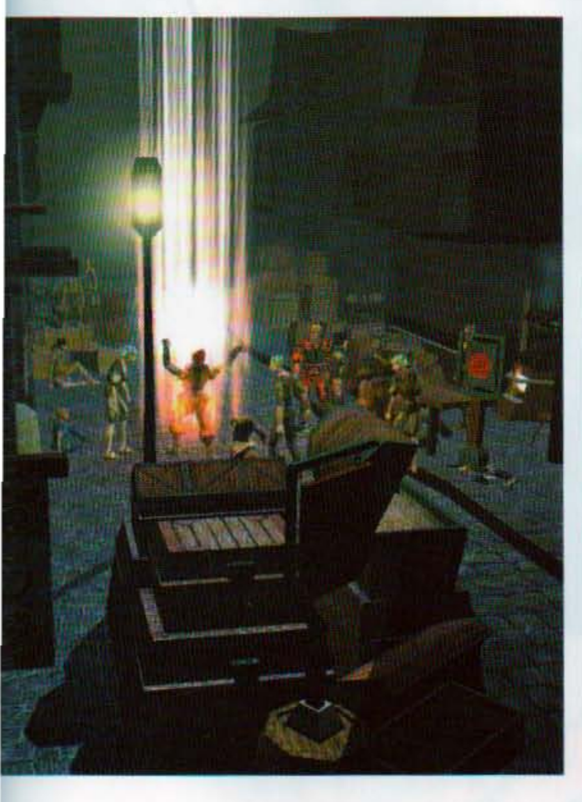
Since development of the massively ambitious *Neverwinter Nights* has taken so long, its release is now set to contest the summer sales with two other high profile attempts to redefine the RPG. Microsoft's *Dungeon Siege*, and Bethesda's *Morrowind*, complete a trio of PC RPGs that share common themes, so it will be interesting to see which title proves the most substantial (though **Edge**'s money is on BioWare). One area in which there's likely to be little to set the titles apart is their respective soundtracks, which are all being composed by the celebrated Jeremy Soule.

















Despite the revolutionary multiplayer aspects of the game, BioWare has not scrimped when it comes to the singleplayer game, which is both sizeable and complex





subrace characteristics, and even set up local, server-based rule tweaks. "As a matter of fact, I could script it so that if you log on to my server with an elf character, you're instantly ambushed and stripped naked and thrown in jail."

Community service

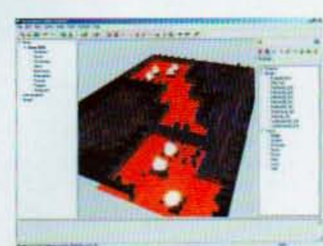
Which is presumably where BioWare's substantial commitment to ongoing community management (and policing) comes in. The real potential of the game to redefine the videogame RPG will, to a large extent, depend on it. "We're going to continue to make sure that people have what they need, and we're going to continue making tools and stuff based on what the community requires," elaborates Zeschuk. "And we're going to recognise the best module makers on our community page." Indeed user-created content will be ranked and given an outline description on the *Neverwinter Nights* community Web page, allowing players to identify adventure modules that suit their playing styles. DMs will be able to bar troublesome players, and BioWare will work directly with the most active users to provide technical support, offering a welcoming framework for new users.

It's also interesting to note the potential involvement of 'Dungeons & Dragons' publisher, Wizards of the Coast. "We're just talking with Ed Stark who's the creative director of 'D&D' development, and we've been talking about a lot of possibilities," explains Oster. "Guest-DM modules; the reimplementation of some classic modules from the early days like the 'Giant' series; and other stuff, like organised play. They are the masters of organised play thanks to the whole 'Magic: The Gathering' thing – there are whole tournaments formed around that game. Why can't you do that with videogames? You have 'D&D' tournament play, where people get together, and rigorously obey the rules, and we can do the same thing with *Neverwinter Nights*."

Another crucial component in the *Neverwinter Nights* mix is the ability to DM games on the fly – and again it's facilitated with a characteristically well designed interface. The principal attraction of the DM server client technology is that it will allow users to run the sort of intimate multiplayer sessions that made *Phantasy Star Online* such a joy to play. But equally, it has the potential to allow players to set up their own MMRPGs, linking their servers to others, creating a distributed network of in-game areas that are constantly linked. It will also give novice module designers room to improve their Aurora toolset skills – by allowing them to cover up any mistakes while running game sessions. In short, it's an immensely powerful tool that allows DMs to manipulate objects, monsters and NPCs, create new objects and items, to actually manifest in the game, and to adjust difficulty levels – all in realtime – supporting constantly evolving playing styles.

Taken alone, this ability to DM on the fly (implemented far more successfully than in *Vampire: The Masquerade*, incidentally) would be enough to set *Neverwinter Nights* from its peers. But when considered alongside the dense and involving singleplayer game, the freedom engendered by the Aurora toolset, and the promised community support, and *Neverwinter Nights* seems set to eclipse the competition. When *Baldur's Gate II* was released, it looked unlikely that its massive scope would be surpassed. **Edge** looks forward to seeing how BioWare will improve upon *Neverwinter Nights*.





The ease of use and far-reaching capacity of the Aurora toolset has the potential to dramatically redefine the RPG landscape, and is a large part of *Neverwinter*'s appeal


Grist
McRae
www.fordrallyesport.net
Ford
lineltex
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fordrallyesport
Ford
Telefonica
MoviStar



Colin McRae Rally 3

You are Colin McRae. Codemasters is taking player involvement to an entirely new level in one of the most focused rally titles to date

Some perspective: the only rally game to have bettered 1998's *Colin McRae Rally* gameplay is its 2000 follow-up. The new sequel, however, plans to set an entirely new benchmark. **Edge** recently caught up with studio head **Guy Wilday** to chat about the project.

What instigated the move to centre the game around Colin?

I think really it's a reflection of the relationship we have with Colin, Nicky [Grist, co-driver] and Ford for the best part of five years now. We've had unparalleled access to them and to what they do, Ford have given us access 'all areas' passes and we've been able to go on rallies with them, to chat to all the engineers, to chat to Colin when he comes back from stages, ask him what decisions he was making and what he's doing and what he's thinking; to talk to the technicians about what's happening.

So really having access to all of that information and having that sort of insiders view of a rally was the starting point. It was really to try and put some of that across in a game. The new consoles allow you to do much more and I think the expectation of them is raised as well and I think what we need to do now is we need to provide a more fluid experience. So really, what we're trying to do with the Career mode this time is that you are Colin, your options are the Ford Focus because that's the car that Colin drives and it's really to provide as much of the periphery stuff as he competes in a real rally as possible.

Not much detail has been given of the game's actual structure…

We've gone for a different route this time. For a start we've split the championship into three years so there's more than one go at winning the championship. We've got a similar number of countries in the game – we've got eight countries but each championship consists of six so every year will be slightly different as we can vary the countries and we can vary the stages you race in.

I think the key difference in the game mechanic this time is that there isn't going to be a top three finish to continue type situation. We're looking to mirror much more Colin's experience, which is that if Colin has a bad rally and crashes out and scores no points he's got to continue to the next rally and try and sort that out and make it back. And that's

- Format: **PlayStation2, Xbox**
- Publisher: **Codemasters**
- Developer: **In-house**
- Release: **September**
- Origin: **UK**





While you're only seeing shots of the Focus WRC, the game includes 16 cars (with original liveries): four WRC, four 2WD, four classics and four Group B. These can be used in the game's Single Stage, Single Rally and multiplayer options – twoplayer on PS2, and four on Xbox (PS2 shots shown)

Mind your fingers

There's something about the Ford WRC team and fingers. Carlos Sainz, one of its drivers, is said to have turned up at one of the service areas last year with a (keen) spectator's digit stuck in the grille. Then there was McRae's broken finger at the Corsica Rally earlier this season which he considered having amputated in order to properly compete in subsequent rounds. Markko Martin, the team's third driver, has so far escaped any prang with his hands intact. So far.

In the end McRae kept his finger – his team moved the gearstick to the left of the steering wheel so that he could keep his good hand on the wheel at all times (the Focus WRC is left-hand drive). Whether true or not, it's more than just good publicity opportunity: it's an indication of the Scot's determination to win and the commitment he shows to his profession. This is what makes McRae such an exciting driver to watch – he only tends to drive flat out – and it's what makes him such a desirable name to lend to a game.



Cars have been extensively modelled and almost every element can fail during a rally

really what we're trying to do this time – you've got to try really hard to compensate for your poor performances.

So terminal crashes are finally in?
Yeah. We've discussed that a lot. That's been a discussion that we've had for five years and it's, "Shall we, shan't we?" And we didn't for *CMR*, you know, the deal was that you'd always be able to finish a rally. And it was very similar with *CMR2* but I think the way things are looking at the moment I think you'll be in a situation where you cannot finish a rally.

There are things in this game – you can rip the wheels off the car – and we've never been able to do that before. You can have a three-wheeled vehicle that is going to struggle to finish a stage and effectively you're going to lose a massive amount of time to do that as well. I think we can definitely look at destroying a car to such a stage that you can't continue and you score no points.

Do you see that as a sign that driving games in general are maturing – that racing game players themselves are evolving?
That's exactly the standpoint we've taken. My hope out of all this is that you will play the game differently as a result of it. I guess with the first couple of games you could hare into a corner flat out not knowing what was round the other side and not worry too much because at the end of the day you were never going to write the car off. Now you're in a situation where if you're going over a blind crest and you don't know what it there you could skid off and go straight over the edge of a cliff and the car is certainly severely damage and it's going to definitely hamper your ability to finish the stage to such an extent that you're out of the running, if not finished completely. So I think you're right, we've taken a different approach for exactly that reason – people have got used to that safety buffer.

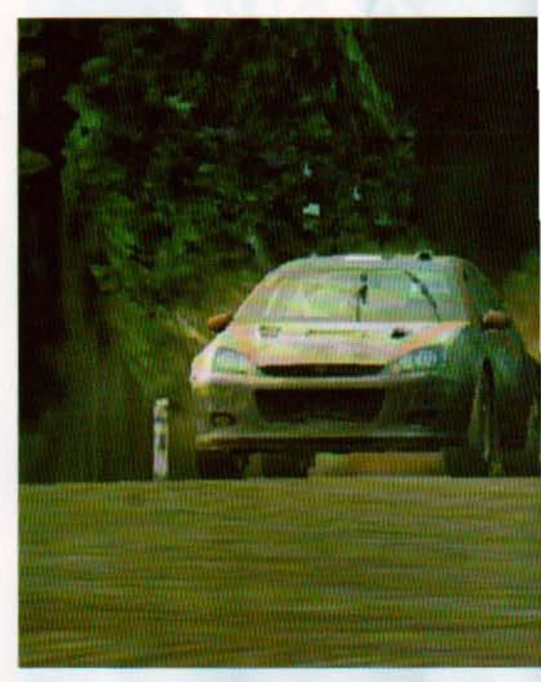
Does that force you to include far more comprehensive pace notes?
Every version of the game we've tried to improve the pace notes and Nicky is very passionate about them. I think he takes more flak than anyone about them unfortunately – he's constantly frustrated by people pointing out errors.

So what he's doing this time is that he's individually pace noting the stages. It means that, for the first time, specific features for specific countries can be pace noted. So whereas before it was fairly general, now we can have very specific calls. Every country has a very different set of conditions, just as in real life and he can call very specific things – if there is a specific obstacle that is there and that you need to be wary of, he can call that. So I'm really quite excited about that – I think the pace notes will be more comprehensive and closer to Colin's system than they've ever been.

When you say the player becomes Colin, just how much non-rally stage involvement is there?
We've considered everything, we know how the whole thing works. You're not going to drive between the stages, I can say that now. We're working on some mechanism for you to move between the stages and we're looking for that to be as fluid as possible but I think driving between the stages is a whole other element, isn't it? It's one of those things, maybe it would be great to include but I think it moves away from what we want from our games. So it's very important for us that we present that time passing and that movement – the idea that you're not just ending one stage and are transported to the start of another.

Have you altered the way you create the stages?
In *CMR* and *CMR2* they were individual stages so we built a stage ribbon, effectively. We're now building 5km x 5km environments and building more than one stage through them. That's enabling us to create a mini-world and the intention is that it'll give us a lot more continuity. You will drive the stage and see a landmark on a hill and the next stage you drive you'll drive past that landmark and look down and see the village that you've just driven through. So you're back into a situation where you feel part of the world, part of the environment. We essentially have two environments for every country, three stages in each of the environments which gives us all sorts of flexibility.

What about dynamic weather?
Well, we had dynamic weather in *CMR2*,



As you'd expect, cars not only deform but get covered in any dirt and mud that gets thrown up. But you can drive through a river to clean it (PS2 shot

"We're looking to mirror much more Colin's experience, which is that if Colin has a bad rally and scores no points he's got to continue to the next rally and try and sort that out"

State of play

Edge has played *WRC*, *RalliSport Challenge*, *Pro Rally 2002* and *V-Rally 3* (which admittedly isn't finished yet) and already *Colin McRae 3* feels ahead of the competition. The team thinks the handling this time around is harder than *CMR2*'s although after extensive play **Edge** would have to disagree. But only slightly. While undoubtedly more refined, there's a predictable quality to *CMR3*'s driving model that makes setting up the car for corners almost instinctive. Elements such as steering weight, braking, accelerating and car response to road surface changes feel just right (at least on Xbox, which is the only version **Edge** has tried to date).



CMR3's rain effect is easily the most realistic **Edge** has seen. Individual drops move up and down the windscreen depending on the car's speed



to a certain extent. To be honest with you I don't think that many people even noticed and it was a whole world of pain. So the approach we've adopted this time is the quality of the visuals that's important and if we have to lock weather conditions to do that, that's what we're going to do. There will be a whole variety of weather in there, across the three years and across the different countries but I think by enabling us to fix conditions for certain countries we'll be able to get the game quality to absolutely top notch and that's what we want to do.

Spectators have traditionally been massively under-represented in rally games yet it's an element that would drastically improve a game's atmosphere...

Spectators is one of those things that when we've had this conversation before... I completely share your enthusiasm and it's something that we've done some work on but we haven't totally got complete yet. So it's a bit difficult for me to comment now on how close we're going to get to what we want to do.

I think you will probably appreciate that having a sea of people is a thorny problem, to say the least. And I think in all reality, it's a problem we'll need to crack with another console. I'm not sure even with the technology that we have today that we'll be able to achieve anything like that. But then there are things we wanted to do with *CMR* and *CMR2* that we've not been able to do but we've been able to do with this game. One thing I remember that we wanted in is the poles with tape that they use everywhere and you can snap that now – you can drive through that and it snaps and flaps in the wind. And we've wanted to do that for five years and it's great to finally see something you've wanted to do – so these ideas aren't forgotten, they're just shelved.





A clear day in the forest but weather effects include fog which should make things interesting. No link-up or online options are planned

How are you dealing with the service areas?

We've tried to progress it again. We have models of the service area for the car to be in so it'll be quite a different environment. You still have certain set-up options that you can do, as before there were elements that you can tweak on the car. I think the big change about the service area this time is that as Colin you don't necessarily have any control over the repair of the car. You drive the car in, you say what sort of changes you want to make and you're in the hands of the mechanics as to what they can do and how much they can do. And I think we're going to take a similar approach.

As Colin, the repair is now up to them and you have to sit it out and then they're going to give you your car back and it's like you're not necessarily sure, "Well, this is what we've been able to fix, the rest you're going to have to cope with." So hopefully that will again add a different aspect to the game.

In an ideal world, what do you think you'll achieve with *CMR3*?

It's been an interesting few years. *CMR*, as you know, was really a bit of a runaway success for us and I don't think anyone would have thought that it would have been as successful as it was. *CMR2* was really to do *CMR* better – it was bigger, better, more. And that was what we wanted to achieve and we went out and achieved that. At the end of the day we could have ported *CMR2* across, enhanced the graphics and got this game out.

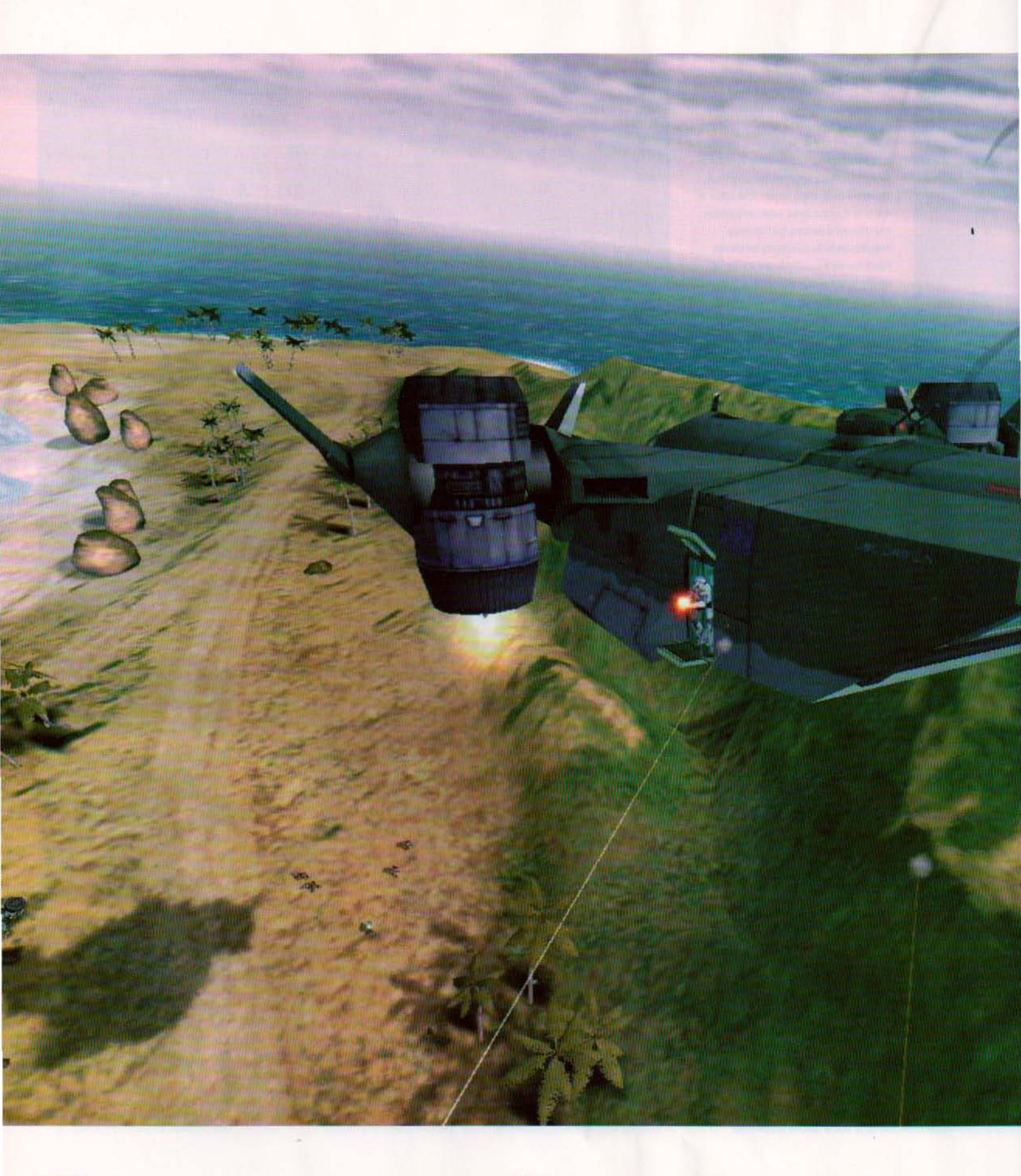
I think we've taken a different approach as we always do – we've enhanced the graphics but we've looked at the game modes and taken a different strategy with the way the game modes and the game mechanic works, we've improved the physics so what we've really tried to do is create a new benchmark. While everyone else is playing catch-up with *CMR2* we're creating the next leap forward in rally games. I guess that's what we're hoping to achieve. We'll see how close we get.







You don't get to drive to stages but instead you're shown brief footage of the Focus approaching the start of stages (top). Replays are almost photorealistic





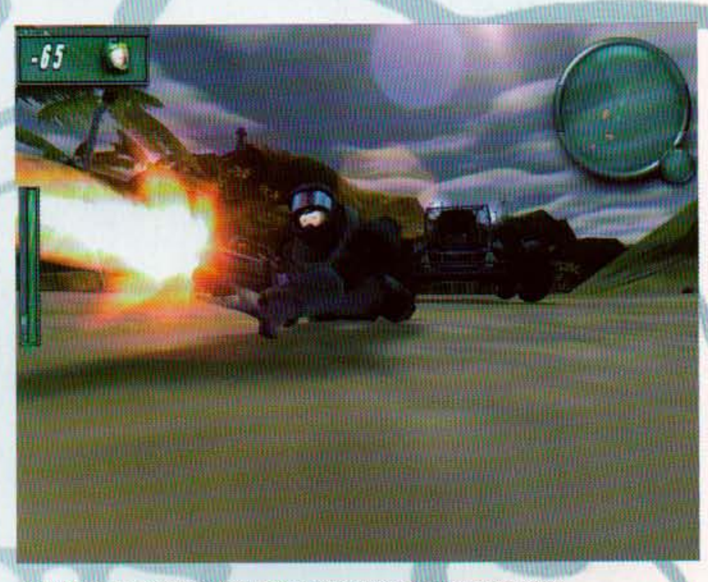
Breed

Can a tiny British development studio with an innovative 3D engine and a great idea for a strategic firstperson shooter really take on the might of today's 70-man teams? And what does it mean for the industry if it can?

This could have serious consequences. Brat Designs' forthcoming debut, *Breed*, is one of the most ambitious projects **Edge** has seen this year – a vast, tactical firstperson shooter combining imaginative design elements with some truly innovative technology. And yet the company employs just six regular staff and a couple of freelancers. If this game is a success, it will blow apart the current industry maxim that big teams are the future. Jobs throughout development will become decidedly unstable.

For the moment though, this is 'merely' a promising project set in motion by Brat founders **Jason Gee** and **Ed Scio**, both of whom have long histories in British development. Scio started out programming Dragon 32 games for Microdeal, then moved on to 16bit stuff for Psygnosis before finally ending up on Acclaim's *Shadowman* team. Gee's first job was at Gremlin but he moved to Core after a particularly messy disagreement involving royalties, a small fight and a bag filled with diskettes. After designing the graphics on all the company's Mega-CD games, he travelled to the States and set up his own company, Player One. When that collapsed ("The guys I employed didn't really know what they were doing.") he joined Acclaim, met Scio and formed Brat Designs.

This too was close to disaster for a while. "We set up Brat with our own cash, to the point that we were all broke," says Gee. "We released all the stuff we'd done as screenshots and movies on our Website, then we went to the bank with the 100,000 hits we'd received and asked for a loan, but they weren't interested. CDV saw the site and signed us up a week before were going to have to shut down."



As with *Halo*, you can hop into a range of vehicles to get about more quickly. Here, though, the environments are vast and open, allowing free-ranging exploration

With the company saved, the duo began recruiting. The idea was to keep things as small as possible. "If you have a team of 30 people, there are probably five doing the real work and 25 hangers-on trying to stay out of the boss' way," says Scio, instantly endearing himself to the rest of the development community.

Battlefield Earth

Breed is set on, and in orbit around, a near-future Earth ravaged by global warming. This could of course be construed as a means of limiting the playable area (the action takes place on a series of islands), but as some of these locations are an impressive 256 miles in diameter, **Edge** will let Brat off. Anyway, a group of soldiers has just returned to Earth aboard the

Format: **PC, Xbox**
Publisher: **CDV**
Developer: **Brat Designs**
Release: **August (PC), TBC (Xbox)**
Origin: **UK**


1
Andy Wright
concept artist
2
Aled Lloyd
3
Jason Gee
4
Nathan McCree
freelance musician
(Meode Productions)
5
Billy Allison
6
Ed Scio
founder/programmer
7
Andy Catling
8
Oliver Davies
freelance designer
(Lost World Designs)



space cruiser Darwin after engaging in interstellar war with a vicious robo-insectoid alien race known as the Breed. Unfortunately, the human forces soon discover that Breed troops have secretly invaded the planet and are using Earthling slaves to build atmosphere reprocessing plants. Obviously this won't do.

Hit and run

What follows is a series of 24 hit-and-run missions against alien bases, vehicles and troops. You begin each mission aboard the Darwin where the objectives are explained via a stylish HUD briefing interface. The next step is to load up a dropship with the relevant weapons, vehicles and personnel, before piloting down to Earth. Mission briefings advise you on what you might need, and where the dropship should land, but you can ignore them all – part of Brat's determination to deliver complete freedom to the player. Incidentally, there are three types of personnel: soldiers and medics have pretty self-explanatory jobs, while engineers are employed to hack security codes and download data – all the technical stuff, essentially.

Missions come in familiar flavours, involving everything from intercepting alien convoys and rescuing human prisoners, to infiltrating radar bases, and tracking down and killing human traitors. Importantly you are only ever part of the team – every mission involves groups of soldiers performing different roles – one unit might go in and

The environments are susceptible to damage with blackened tree stumps (left) providing the only proof of a recent gun fight



At one point Scio is trying to demo the sniper rifle when a well-aimed missile from a distant Breed gun emplacement blows his soldier to pieces. Apparently they don't wait for you to learn how to use your weapons around here. **Edge** sees another section where the player is running through a valley while human and Breed heavy guns pound each other from opposite cliffs. As you run beneath you can see the missile vapour trails scorch across the sky in both directions shortly followed by ear-bleeding detonations. It's an intricately simulated universe with skirmishes, explosions, bombing runs, and plasma cannon battles going on all around you.

To ensure a diverse gaming experience, Brat is varying the types



Distant targets can be attacked with rocket launchers, or laser-targeted for incoming air raids. Just stay out of the vicinity when they fly by and deliver the goods

The idea was to keep things small. "If you have a team of 30 people, there are probably five doing the real work and 25 hangers-on trying to stay out of the boss' way"

blow up an alien base while another keeps Breed troops occupied and a third flies overhead providing air cover. You can choose which of these groups you want to join and how you fulfil the mission. However, Brat is keen to point out that this is no *Rainbow Six*. Your control over other members of your unit is restricted to a few simple orders – the AI handles the rest. Brat didn't want players to get bogged down in the tactics of troop dispersal.

This multiple-unit, guerrilla warfare approach creates a lively and spectacularly dangerous environment.

and strengths of alien resistance encountered through the game. "The number of enemy forces – and their abilities and weaponry – will vary from mission to mission," confirms Gee. "For example, during the course of the first mission the player will tackle large numbers of, relatively lightly armed, Breed ground troops – resulting in some spectacular close-range firefights. As the player progresses he'll find himself up against larger, more heavily armed Breed, as well as a range of Breed vehicles (including speeders, battle tanks, dropships and fighters).

Perhaps the closest comparison to the scale of the battles would be a bigger, futuristic *Operation Flashpoint*."

Brat is also keen to provide a multi-faceted combat experience. It's not just about running in and trying to gun aliens down. Instead you might want to laser-designate targets such as vehicles and buildings and call in air strikes – a feature surely inspired by US tactics in the Gulf War and Afghanistan. Alternatively, you can use explosive charges to distract Breed troops, or send them running off in the wrong direction. They're not stupid though. Breed soldiers (imagine a cross between the aliens in 'Starship Troopers' and the rolling battle droids in 'Phantom Menace') hunt in packs using





Before each mission, the dropship has to be loaded up with personnel, weapons and vehicles. You can then pilot this down to Earth within *Breed*'s main game engine – a rather pleasant touch

Mercury Rev'd

Breed features a consistent and immersive 3D world. Players can wander around the Darwin mother craft, walk into the landing bay, board a dropship, fly it down to Earth and start blasting aliens. This is carried out seamlessly, and in realtime, within the game engine – a marvellously flexible creation, known in-house as Mercury.

The key feature of this powerful set-up is the scripting system. The physical attributes of every object are written up in a text file, from which the engine draws its parameters. Every vehicle, for example, is accompanied by a series of figures defining its top speed, mass, suspension, etc. This allows everything to be edited on the fly and takes a major bottleneck out of the development process. As Gee explains, "By implementing the majority of the game features – vehicles, animations, environments and missions – through its scripting language, the whole team is able to add content. Coupled with some proprietary file exportation software, this system allows us to construct the levels, export animations and create trigger points without the need for custom editors. So, the programmer can concentrate on implementing cool features rather than worrying about more menial tasks."

The way in which physical values are attached to separate components also makes the system as adaptable as a Lego kit. Artists can take the jet engine from a vehicle and attach it to the back of a soldier, creating a fully working jetpack complete with the correct physics. Eighteen wheels could be added to an APC and they'll all react correctly to an environment. A neat, time-saving solution all round.

up-to-date AI that gives them hearing and line-of-sight. They talk to, and learn from, each other and will use decent military tactics, advancing in different formations to cut off your soldiers. They'll also launch intermittent attacks on the Darwin, so you'll have to go back, get in a fighter craft and engage in space combat. "The game was originally a space shoot 'em up until someone told us they don't sell," admits a laconic Scio.

War zones

The environments are beautifully detailed and lusciously organic. Mountainous grasslands, tropical rainforests and frozen tundras all appear, each providing the player with distinct physical challenges. Naturally these locations are as susceptible to damage as the warring factions themselves. Fire a plasma rifle at a tree and it'll fall to the ground smashing into pieces on impact.

Vehicle design is impressively diverse. While the many different tanks, aircraft, APCs and buggies of the human forces show anime influences, artist Andy Wright has used organic themes to construct the alien fleet. The Breed personnel carrier, for example, is based on the body of a dragonfly, while the alien dropship's landing pattern has been inspired by the movement of a manta ray. And, of course, vehicles leave tracks and dust trails behind them in the earth. The particles float through the air and disperse in your wake.

Obviously there will be a multiplayer mode and Brat is looking to offer some variations on classic frag-fest themes. Capture the flag, for example, becomes Blow up the mothership. Here two groups of players based in different battle cruisers, jump into fighters and attempt to land in the other team's base craft. They must then plant some explosives and get out. So you get space combat and sabotage, as well as the usual running around shooting people. There will be several more offbeat takes on standard multiplayer modes as well as the option to play all 24 singleplayer options with up to 16 players – a truly intriguing prospect.

And this is just the beginning. Brat is already making plans for a sequel, expanding the game to take in a whole solar system, perhaps even a galaxy – rather than just Earth. There are also firm plans for an Xbox conversion. Microsoft has seen early code and is impressed, certain that it could be ported across to the console in a matter of days. That is, of course, where *Halo* comparisons will begin in earnest, but Gee is nonplussed, "The fact that *Breed* is a futuristic shooter where you can also utilise vehicles means we get compared to *Halo* quite often. However, the similarities are only skin deep. Whereas *Halo* is a very focused console-style shooter, *Breed* is probably more comparable to something like *Operation Flashpoint* – in that it is more open and sprawling, with a realistic feel. We think they're very different styles of game." In the end, it might well prove that the only truly comparable element is quality.



Each landing party has a different role within the mission objective. You can choose which you want to join, giving out orders to your AI allies





Deus Ex II

With its compelling story and open gameplay, Deus Ex won just about every 'game of the year' award going in 2000. Now work has begun on a sequel so advanced it may set benchmarks in every area of videogame development

Below an enormous American flag the sign says 'Ion Storm voice acting auditions this way.' **Edge** has finally arrived. The journey over was not a good one. A tornado swept in immediately after touchdown at Dallas Fort Werth airport. While the ground crew and control tower staff were evacuated, our lone passenger plane was left to rattle unnervingly for two hours in a holding area as raindrops the size of melons battered the fuselage. The connecting flight to Austin was not much better. The plane hit an air pocket so cavernous it plunged seemingly hundreds of feet, sending complimentary drinks flying amid brief embarrassed yelps of surprise. The stewards were instructed to abandon their trolleys and belt up. You know things are bad when it is simply too dangerous to serve cheese snacks.

Situated about ten miles from downtown Austin, Ion Storm's studio is typical for a US developer. Housed in a pristine, yet soulless office block, it is a labyrinth of interconnecting rooms and twisting corridors. In the kitchen you'll find soda machines and enormous tubes of non-dairy creamer. There's a communal recreation room complete with ping pong table (**Warren Spector** claims to be a skilled participant), 'foosball', *Tekken 3* cabinet and every console launched during the last ten years. Apparently *Grand Theft Auto III* is the game of choice round here at the moment, but that frivolous cartoon crime caper is a far cry from what **Edge** has come to see – although the notion of player freedom within a simulated world is similar. No, **Edge** is here for dark as

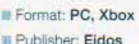


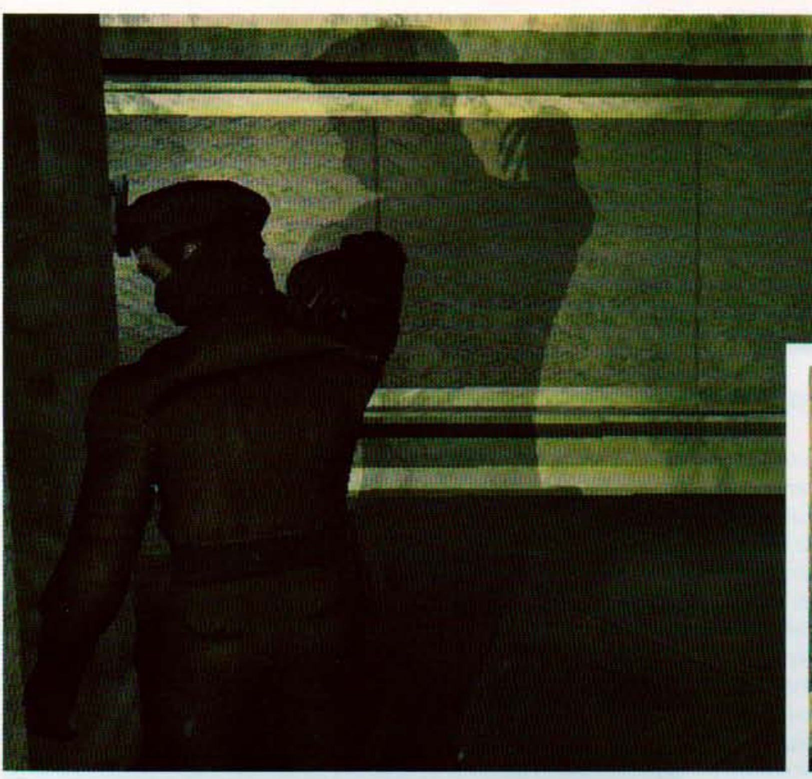
Layered textures add depth to every object in the environment. Even the floor tiles look three dimensional – dynamic lights pick out the edges





- Format: **PC, Xbox**
- Publisher: **Eidos**
- Developer: **Ion Storm**
- Release: **TBC**
- Origin: **US**







Every object in *Deus Ex II* projects a precise realtime shadow depending on the source of the lighting. This isn't just about aesthetics. Guards waiting around a corner, might unknowingly cast their shadows onto the opposite wall (below) giving the player pre-warning that danger is ahead

hell cyberpunk action. **Edge** is here for *Deus Ex II*.

For those who prefer to avoid stunningly well conceived, genre-warping adventure games, *Deus Ex* was a firstperson RPG based in a dark near future of government conspiracy, bio-terrorism and nanotechnology. The player became JC Denton a nano-augmented agent of UNATCO (United Nations Anti-Terrorist Coalition) sent in to smash a terrorist organisation holed up in the Statue of Liberty. Like 'The X-Files' however, the conspiracies at the heart of the plot – cleverly taking in real world favourites such as the Illuminati, Majestic 12 and Area 51 – were more complex than they first appeared. The myriad shady hackers, politicians, street hustlers and activists you met always had hidden agendas, and allegiances constantly shifted throughout the game. Most importantly of all, every problem you faced had multiple solutions. You could charge through the 13 missions killing everyone in sight, or you could lurk in the shadows, learning skills such as lock picking and hacking. It was a totally immersive experience.

Deus Ex II is set 15 years after the climax of the original game. JC Denton has disappeared, and it's the player's job to track him down. This time there will be four genetically modified super agents to choose from, each cloned from JC's DNA. Two of the selectable characters are women, which turns out to be a long time ambition for the team. Last time, deadlines forced them to drop the idea, this time you get the feeling Spector won't let that happen. "One of the things in *Deus Ex* we really wanted to do was provide a female player character, so if you're a woman and you want someone you can relate to as you play through how ever many hours of gameplay, you can have someone to relate to. In *Deus Ex II* we are going to offer that. I mean I will ship the damn game late, I just don't care, we have to provide a female avatar, someone to represent the women who are already playing the game."







The artists are currently working on some typically cyberpunk lab settings – all grey concrete and futuristic computer panels. As with the first game, however, these sci-fi settings are contrasted with more earthy locations. In *DEII*, it's Egypt and Germany

"I will ship the damn game late, I just don't care, we have to provide a female avatar, someone to represent the women who are already playing the game"

World tour

The globe-trotting element is back again. *Deus Ex* took in New York, Hong Kong and Paris, adding a worldwide significance to the plot. Number two starts in a science lab in Seattle (the team has used photos of the city to map in realistic features) and eventually moves out to Cairo and Germany. However, project director, **Harvey Smith** explains that Ion Storm is also making significant changes to the game structure. "The last game had 79 maps and was way too long basically. A huge percentage of people didn't finish it. And what we decided to shoot for this time was to give the casual gamer a higher percentage chance of finishing the game, but also to add more depth to each environment so that, once again, there are multiple ways to solve all the problems. So if you're hardcore you can finish the game five different ways, basically."

That's pretty much all Ion Storm will say about the plot for now, apart from confirming that many of the most popular characters and factions from the first game will be coming back, some more powerful than ever, others shadows of their former selves. Spector reveals that Hong Kong mover and shaker Tracer Tong is his favourite character, and that Tong has a larger role to play in the sequel. He also mentions that the moral implications of killing will return as a key factor. In *Deus Ex*, characters would often chastise you for taking lives unnecessarily. It affected the whole course of the game. That will prove to be the case with the sequel. Everything else **Edge** asks is met with a stern 'no comment'. It's time to change the subject.

Physics is going to be an important part of *Deus Ex II*. The physics system in the original game was, in the words of Harvey Smith, "rudimentary." For the sequel Ion Storm has licensed the well-respected Havok SDK, an authoritative out-of-the-box physics engine also

1 **Paul Effinger**
artist

2 **John Harries**
programmer

3 **Jim Magill**
artist

4 **Brian Glines**
designer

5 **Mike Privett**
programmer

6 **Kent Hudson**
designer

7 **Jeremy Graves**
designer

8 **Alex Brandon**
lead audio engineer

9 **David Reese**
programmer

10 **Clay Hoffman**
designer

11 **Steve Powers**
senior creative designer

12 **Todd Simmons**
audio engineer

13 **Nate Blaisdell**
designer

14 **Chris Carollo**
lead programmer

15 **Warren Spector**
studio director

16 **Brian Sharp**
programmer

17 **Matt Baer**
programmer

18 **Monte Martinez**
senior technical designer

19 **Tara Thomas**
associate producer

20 **Alex Duran**
programmer

21 **Ricardo Bare**
designer

22 **Harvey Smith**
project director

23 **Bill Money**
producer



AI

The *Deus Ex* AI was tacked on in the last few months of development and never satisfied the team. For the sequel, Ion Storm has bought in AI specialist **Paul Tozour** who previously worked on the *Mech Warrior* titles. By the time the game finishes he will have been coding the AI for two years.

One of the most impressive elements is the location specific behaviour exhibited by key NPCs. A guard in a crowded street won't necessarily chase you if you run past noisily – he expects a certain amount of bustle. But if the same guard is posted in the foyer of a high security area and you make a sound as you're sneaking in, he'll be much more likely to investigate. The form of this investigation is adaptable too. As Tozour explains, "We can adjust the AI's overall alertness sensitivity, ie their sensitivity to individual types of 'evidence' (say, the relative importance of hearing a footstep as opposed to noticing a shadow); the specific thresholds between the various alert states (that is, the specific locations on their alertness gauge that indicate when the NPC should switch between green, yellow, and red alert states); or even individual sensory parameters (such as the yaw and pitch angles of an AI's view cone, how well it can see in darkness, how far it can see in the distance, and so on)."

The AI is also used to add collateral detail to the game. NPCs can actually talk to each other and these exchanges aren't scripted – their responses are emergent, based on a vocabulary of around 15,000 words. Okay these are just short chats about the weather or how much their jobs stink, but it's a fascinating look into where AI is going in the future.







NPCs react to sound and movement with a range of context-specific responses. You can dull their sense by shutting a door behind you before searching an office, or switching on a noisy piece of machinery so they can't hear your footsteps





used by the likes of Blizzard and Valve. The aim is to create the most realistic environment possible, not just for cosmetic effect but to enhance the gameplay. "Our whole manifesto is built around the idea of creating immersive simulations," confirms Spector, "we're trying to make the players believe they are in that world and that they have the power to interact with that world. Simulation is what makes that possible. We're not hard coding puzzles, with one solution or even with two or three solutions, we're actually simulating a world and things just work, because the simulation is so deep."

Simulation sandbox

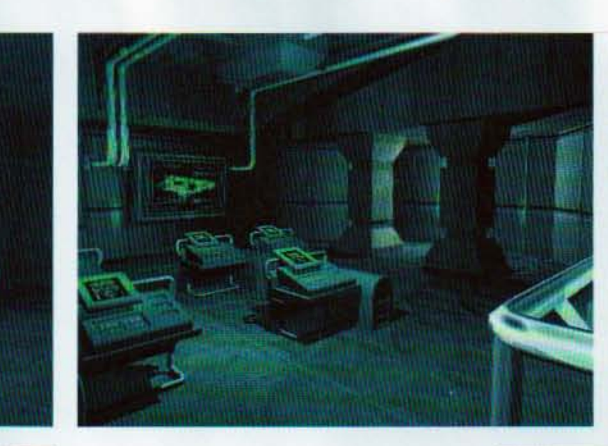
The point, it seems, is to empower the player. *Deus Ex II* will not be about solving puzzles set by the designer, it'll be about the creative use of objects and skills to overcome problems (what Smith calls 'a simulation sandbox'). It's also about providing a realistic sensory environment. One key element of this is the complex sound propagation model Ion Storm is building. In the first game, a player rifling through some high security office might have closed the door behind them in the hope that passing guards would be unable to hear. Unfortunately, sound passed through walls like empty space. They were kidding themselves. According to Smith everything is a lot more true-to-life in the sequel, "This time with the new sound propagation, you drop a cup off the desk and the sound hits the walls and bounces and hits the floor and stops. And if the door's open it will calculate and bounce out into the hall, and the guard might hear it. If the door's closed, it'll muffle the sound, say, 50 to 80 per cent. If the window is broken out, the sound will bounce out, if it's not, the glass will muffle the sound by 25 per cent or something. All this stuff has huge stealth ramifications."

Of course there will be a major graphical overhaul. Spector admits that one of the major complaints directed at the first game went along the lines of "well the visuals could have been better." *Deus Ex II* makes extensive use of currently in-vogue multi-pass, or layered texturing to add greater definition to 3D models. As the term suggests, instead of pasting a single texture onto a polygon, the artists layer textures on top of one another, creating a more defined and detailed object. Three layers are usual: one for the normal texture map, one for a diffuse texture and one for a specular texture that reacts specifically to lighting. This is used to add sheen to a leather couch, or a pleasant sweaty look to the chest of a fat janitor.

Through these techniques Smith reckons the artists can make a 3,000 poly model look like 30,000. Specularity also adds touches of realism to the environments – for example, specular textures on a tiled floor allow dynamic lights to pick out the edges between each tile, which adds depth to an otherwise unconvincingly flat surface.



Every little object in the *Deus Ex II* world can be picked up and manipulated. They're all prone to real world physics, too. Paper burns, and fire spreads naturally. This is a dangerous world



Greater character realism is another major ambition. The emotionless faces of *Deus Ex* will be enlivened by independently animated eyebrows, noses and mouths capable of a range of emotions and expressions. To help in this area Ion Storm has licensed another thirdparty product, named Lip Sync, freeing up programmers from having to hard code every single emotional response. Meanwhile, the rather unconvincing hand-drawn animation used in the original game has been abandoned in favour of motion capturing, so movement is smooth and realistic. Smith also explains how, when characters are shot, or hit with the blast wave from an explosion, the physics engine takes over, "We're gonna rag doll the bodies, so they will flip and flop and roll down the stairs properly'.

When the tour is over, Spector takes **Edge** and a few members of the US press into his office to explain the ethos behind Ion Storm. It turns out, a while ago he sat down and wrote a manifesto for the company which he distributed internally – a sort of Jerry Maguire-style mission statement without the syrupy sentiment. In it, he highlights one critical concept: player experience is more important than developer creativity. "Emergent behaviour, driven by player interaction with our game worlds and game systems (simulated and emulated), is more interesting than prescripted action," the document insists. It seems then, that *Deus Ex II*, is taking the multiple path, multiple solution nature of the original game to its unfathomable conclusions. The development team promises a world where every moment, every conversation, every gameplay problem is dynamic and unique, guided but not controlled by supremely detailed physics. "As soon as you say the phrase 'scripted sequence', that implies that someone has to write a specific script to make a specific event happen. And our games are all built on simulation, our games are built on systems that interact in intricate and cool and complex ways, and players can like nudge this system so it bumps into this system, and it results in this thing. And it all magically works."

"With every game we make we want to advance the state of the art in some significant and obvious way. We want to change the way people think about games"



Voice acting auditions? And you thought it was all done in-house by the programmers

Beyond that, Ion Storm's ambitions are modest. It just wants to redefine what videogames are, or can be. Spector, the ultimate gaming evangelist has one last point to make, "I actually want us to stand for something. We're not just making fun games, we're not just rehashing the games of the past. With every game we make we want to advance the state of the art in some significant and obvious way. We want to change the way people think about games – not just gamers, but parents and teachers and everybody. We think that games are a significant part of our culture – of worldwide culture. It's not just a pastime for kids anymore – there's something big going on here, the world is changing."

It certainly is. Two years ago the world of *Deus Ex*, the multi-layered government conspiracies, the threat of bio-terrorism, was merely dark fiction. Then in September 2001 al-Qaida flew a couple of passenger jets into the World Trade Centre, and days later someone started sending anthrax through the post. Everything changed. Suddenly army surplus stores throughout the western world were selling out of gas masks, governments began frantically topping up their stockpiles of small pox vaccinations, and the prospect of a lone terror chief wandering the streets with a suitcase full of radioactive caesium and TNT became a real prospect.

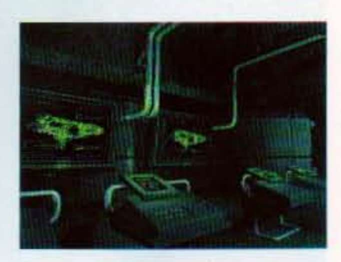
The videogame as prophetic medium? Who'd have thought it. But that's what happens when you draw your themes from newspaper headlines rather than comic books. When your frames of reference extend beyond *Mario*, *Metal Gear Solid* and a few cult animes. When marketing plays second fiddle to game design, rather than the other way around. This is the real world and it's dark, and getting darker all the time. If videogames are to be respected as adult entertainment they will have to deal with that.

Lighting

"The stuff we're doing with lighting is insane,"proclaims Spector. "We're doing volumetric shadows so you can douse lights and create your own areas of darkness. Everything about our technology is to deepen the simulation, and to provide moments of gameplay." All the lights in the game are dynamic. If a bomb goes off in a room, the ceiling lights will swing backwards and forwards sending weird shadows and shapes swirling across the walls. If a guard drops his torch, or if you kick a lamp over, the light emitted reacts accordingly, just as it would in the real world. "We really went over the top with shadow, as stealth is really important. It's like an interactive Hitchcock movie," adds Smith.

Apart from creating dark places to hide in, another gameplay ramification is the way you can use shadows to spot enemy personnel – if they're in the right place, their shadows will cast around corners. As the icing on the cake, all objects self-shadow: if a character goes for his gun, his hand casts a shadow on his leg. Spector points out, however, that this quest for realism comes with its own problems, "Because we're getting closer, everyone's standards are getting higher. People are saying, 'Oh look the fingers don't move right on the shadow.' Well you know, in the last game they didn't even have fingers."





The green light thrown out by the animating VDU screens is, yes, realtime. Shoot the screens and everything goes dark. Which is perfect for the stealth player with a set of decent night vision goggles





Photography: **Hiroki Izumi**

Inside…

Capcom Co Ltd

It may have some of the most well known game franchises in the industry, but, as Edge found out, Capcom is no stranger to big risk originality

Ghosts *'n Goblins*, *Street Fighter*, *Biohazard*. Capcom has become synonymous with the videogame franchise. Long before Eidos claimed the world heavyweight cash-cow title (for milking the *Tomb Raider* series – one every Christmas for five years running) the Osaka-based videogame company had built its empire on the if-it-ain't-broke-don't-fix-it philosophy. But with games such as *Auto Modellista* and *Tekki* (*Steel Battalion* in the west) on the horizon, Capcom seems hellbent on taking more risks, just as the rest of the industry is becoming more conservative. **Edge** went inside Capcom's R&D departments to take a look at two summer releases that exemplify Capcom's schizophrenic outlook: the sequel to *JoJo's Bizarre Adventure* and the outrageously ambitious *Tekki*.

'Hardcore' is a flagrantly overused word in videogame circles, but it seems entirely appropriate in front of **Atsushi Inaba**, producer of *Tekki*. "Yes, it's been a real nightmare for engineers to meet our requests on this project," he sighs. The controller, featured in **E**109 (p21) has already generated copious column inches in magazines across the globe. Hardcore? You only need to fully absorb the implications of his next statement. "We had to adapt some of the features for safety issues. For example, we have an eject button. We wanted it to be under a glass plate so the player would have to break it in order to access the button. This was obviously too risky as it could wound the player and be costly for users to replace the plate. Yes, we had some very crazy ideas. This eject feature is still important because if you die in the game it is over. I mean, really over. The game erases your saved data. So you absolutely need to eject, which makes the player more involved in the game."

So, not one for the occasional gamer, then? "No, we want the experience to be extreme," Inaba-san continues. "I think titles like *Virtual On* or *Armored Core* are more like fighting games. I mean, it is like having characters disguised

Atsushi Inaba, producer, *Tekki*

Yoshihiro Sudo, producer, *JoJo's Bizarre Adventure*

FAQ

Company name: Capcom Co Ltd
Founded: 1979
HQ: Osaka
Number of employees: 1150
Selected softography: *Vulgus* (1984, coin-op), *1942* (1984, coin-op), *Gun Smoke* (1985, coin-op), *Street Fighter* (1987, coin-op), *Mega Man* (1987, NES), *Strider Hiryu* (1989, coin-op), *Final Fight* (1989, coin-op), *Street Fighter II* (1991,coin-op), *Biohazard* (1996, PS), *Biohazard 2* (1998, PS), *Dino Crisis* (1999, PS), *Power Stone* (1999, DC), *Biohazard 3: Last Escape* (2000, PS), *Biohazard Code: Veronica* (2000, DC), *Power Stone 2* (2000, DC), *Onimusha* (2001, PS2), *Devil May Cry* (2001, PS2), *Maximo* (2001, PS2), *Genma Onimusha* (2002, Xbox), *Onimusha 2* (2002, PS2)
Projects in development: *Auto Modellista* (PS2), *Biohazard 0* (GC – see **E**112), *Biohazard Online* (PS2), *Devil May Cry 2* (PS2), *Dino Stalker* (PS2), *Red Dead Revolver* (PS2), *Onimusha* (GBA), *Super Ghouls 'n Ghosts R* (GBA). In addition, a racing game, an adventure and a 3D beat 'em up code-named *Group S Racing*, *Glass Rose*, and *Capcom All Stars* respectively are believed to be in progress (formats TBC)



as robots. *Tekki* is about realism, about the military situation… this is a totally different kind of game. You are truly taking part in an ongoing conflict; a battlefield with troops in combat situations all around you. Your objective is not really the mission but ultimately the mastery of your robot. The basic idea was to have your own cockpit at home."

Human league

Interestingly, most of the team working on *Tekki* are not Capcom employees – perhaps a reason why the game is so unusual. While around half the development effort comes from staff who worked on *Devil May Cry*, the rest is made up of ex-Human employees (responsible for the *Clock Tower* series). They quit Human, started a new company and came to Capcom with the 'crazy' idea that was *Tekki*. Inaba-san reveals that if it wasn't for the intervention of *Biohazard* creator, Shinji Mikami, Capcom directors would have rejected the project.

The time and cost of producing the controller has been particularly demanding. "I'm conscious that the cost is a big issue. Even if the game looks cool, you would have to possess an Xbox to experience it. If you have to spend $600, including buying an Xbox, to play *Tekki* in the US, this would form a formidable obstacle for the game's success. Of course, we wanted *Tekki*'s profitability to be as good as any other title on Xbox. Actually, I think we did it. Originally, the game would need be sold at a price close to ¥39,980 (£214). In this condition, nobody could afford it. So Capcom and the company in charge of the



Tekki's cockpit is particularly claustrophobic but images suggest that every variable of the machine's operation is available on the display. This should ensure that the realism is not interrupted by having to select further menu screens. A smaller monitor tracks missiles





controller had to reduce costs. I refused to have an external additional power supply and my ambition was to have everything passing through the USB connector. The engineers studied the problem and at first the power was insufficient. I think we reached the maximum of what is technically possible. I believe this is the smartest solution possible. To be honest, my ultimate ambition was to have everything working wireless but I was asked to give it up."

Fifty dedicated buttons, two joysticks and a Smashie and Nicey-style lever give the player the complete mecha experience. "The game structure has been designed around the controller. You cannot possibly manage it fully from the beginning. The left joystick controls the robot movement and the right one targets enemies. The pedal alters speed. With these three features you have total control since the joysticks have triggers to fire. One mission after another, the game adds new features to enlarge your experience and possibilities."

And just how complex do these operations become? "Eventually you will face greater opposition using more elaborate tactics and weaponry. For example, enemies can fire guided missiles at you and as you might not be able to dodge the missiles, the addition of the chaff button would give you the adequate counter-measure to fool them. Moreover, you will have to call for special units to bring you ammunition. To do so, you need to use a special radio tuner button, set at the right frequency. Everything is very realistic. Calling for ammunition in the middle of a fight would expose the units to enemy fire and eventually to their destruction. So as you master the controls you will find a new dimension to the game, a greater experience. More than facing a variety of situations, you will fully exploit the controller to get involved in this simulator."

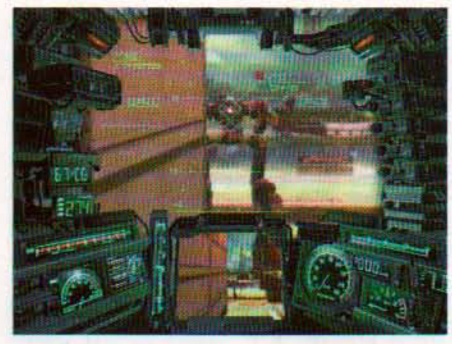
Fat controller

Set in the near future and ranged against a formidable and overwhelming enemy, *Tekki*'s setting is hardly original. However, the stage and mission structure is a little bit different and has a satisfying circularity. Rather than play though linear levels the player takes on 12 stages each with individual missions. Beat the boss at the end of the last area and the stages repeat, but with completely different goals and scenarios second time round. This has been arranged to exploit every function of the controller. Only when 24 stages have been beaten does the 'true' final mission open up.

But doubts as heavy as the Xbox hang over the project. Something which Inaba-san doesn't shy away from. "In Japan, Xbox's situation is not good, but in a way, *Tekki* is one of the rare titles capable of increasing the console's popularity. Other developers' titles are good but they are bought by people who already have the machine. *Tekki* has this unique controller, capable of bringing new users to Xbox. I would like the game to sell around 200,000 units worldwide. If we are only able to sell a few thousands copies there would not be much sense in doing a follow-up. I would think about including a network or online element in a sequel. Plus, in this configuration, you would have to rethink the game in order to manage teamplay rather than stand-alone play. This would entail completely different gameplay and development. Users will have the final word on *Tekki*."

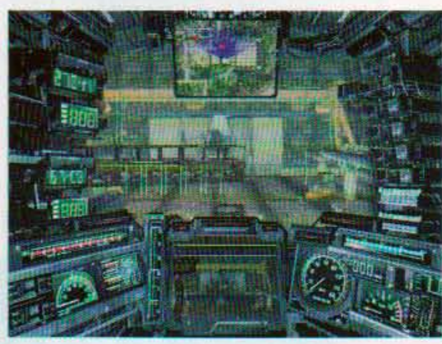
Capcom is now structured in a similar manner to Sega's creative divisions. There are six main R&D studios headed up by some of Capcom's oldest hands. Studio #1 is administered by Noritaka Funamizu, Studio #2 by Keiji Inafune, Studio #3 by Tatsuya Minami, Studio #4 by Shinji Mikami, Studio #5 by Yohichai Egawa and Studio #6 by Ray Nakazato. While *Tekki* seems to offer a glimpse of The New, the other divisions at Capcom are keen to exploit old labels with fresh ideas.

"Tekki is about realism... this is a totally different kind of game. You are truly taking part in an ongoing conflict"

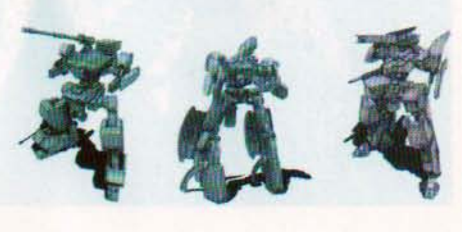


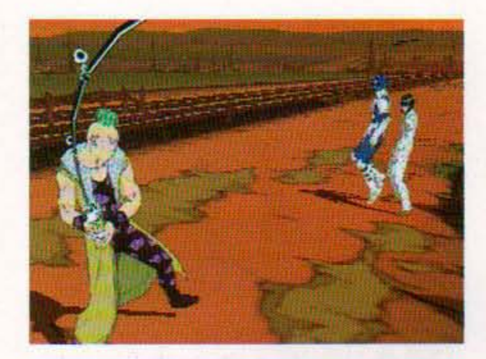




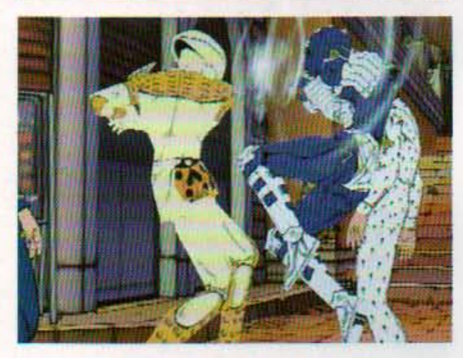


Although *Tekki*'s cockpit display is comprehensive, it's nothing compared to the peripheral which even boasts an eject button and lights that fade and glow. A series of tutorial-style missions will ease the player into the game. Hopefully, this should ensure the manual isn't too thick









Although set predominantly in Italy, *JoJo's Bizarre Adventure* adopts a more traditional manga aesthetic

Edge spoke to **Yoshihiro Sudo**, producer of *JoJo's Bizarre Adventure* on PS2 at Studio #1.

From the outside, the game seems to exemplify Capcom's core philosophy of squeezing a concept for all it is worth. But is *JoJo's Bizarre Adventure* any different? "I think so. When we developed the previous *JoJo* in our Department #3 inside Capcom, we were surprised as the game exceeded our expectation at its release," defends Sudo-san. "So we wanted to do another, but not a true sequel. Using the same world and addressing the population of *JoJo*'s fans, we decided to make a different kind of game. Aside from the new visual look, we are offering a variety of experiences to users. This is basically an action game offering various stages, but each delivers a variety of gameplay. You will find a kind of shooting game but also a 3D fighting game."



Manga tradition

The game's heritage is strange indeed. Taken from an Italian comic book, the franchise has become popular enough in Japan and America to warrant several batches of figurines. Those who have never read the comic book, or played the 2D beat 'em up on coin-op, PlayStation or Dreamcast should know that the title is based around three of the main heroes: Jonathan Joestar, Joseph Joestar and Kujo Jotaro. While the aesthetic remains firmly in the manga tradition the setting retains its Mediterranean flavour and sees the heroes fighting Italian super villains.

But there's a twist. The mechanic which made the original game so unique has been transferred to this 3D sequel. Instead of offering tired special moves, each character is possessed by a Stand, a super-powered alter ego. "The Stand is the core element of the game mechanism," adds Sudo-san. "It is also one of the coolest visual elements in this title. It is very similar to those in the original manga. You can use them for offensive or defensive actions, but this time you don't need a gauge to call your Stand during the fight. You are free, no limits – or almost none. Only if you get a given amount of damage, your Stand may disappear in the course of the action."



Outrageously camp costumes and flamboyant special moves will be the order of the day. *Tekken* fans may find the light-hearted tone alienating

Already the visual style shows an energy which will hopefully translate into the game proper. "We wanted the characters to be as cool as possible. To do this we tried a more animated orientation, so it was closer to the original masterpiece. Our original cel shading technique we called Artistoon – the same that's used in *Auto Modellista*. But it is demanding. I can't tell you where the machine limits are but I can assure you it's quite difficult. And we are still fighting to get the game running smoothly in the framework we have set. We have in mind what we want to do and what we can do with regard to the original manga. The point is to evaluate how far we can implement everything to produce a great gaming experience."

Until playable code emerges it's impossible to tell just how well the blend of fighting and shooting will hang together. And traditionally, 3D beat 'em ups have suffered from the nightmares of introducing an intelligent camera system. Sudo-san is at least aware of the challenge. "Our main question was what 3D could bring to the game. The answer was through the stages. We had to think what users would find cool to do with a character. At an early point there was not much difference between 2D or 3D. But later, we really had to think 3D. For example, we had a cool 3D character using our own shading technique. We identified the action we wanted it to perform so we had to then design the movements with motion and camera angles."

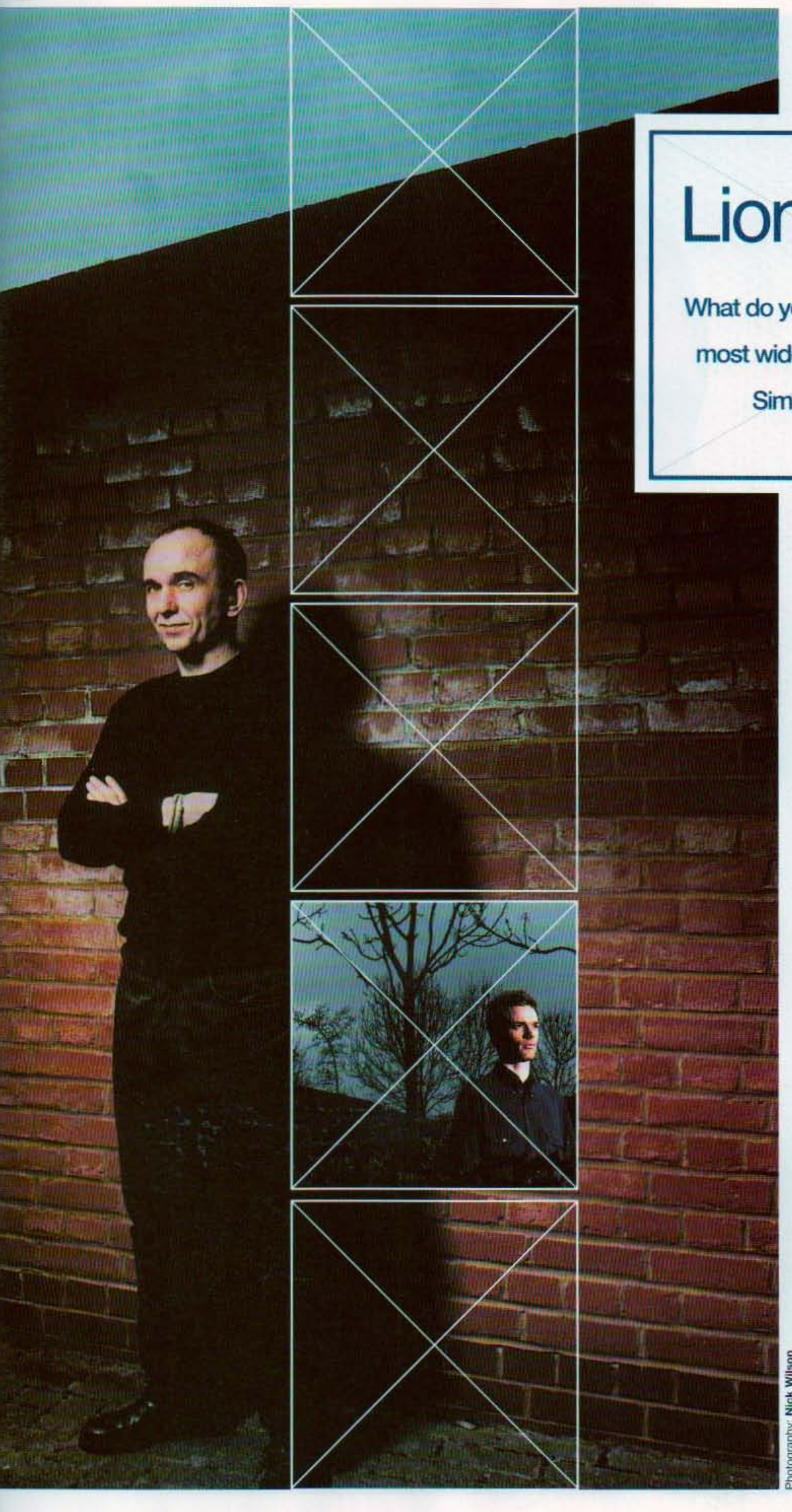
While *JoJo's Bizarre Adventure* will not be for everyone, it's refreshing to see the Capcom allowing its creative talent to try new imaginative avenues. And while the company clearly has an element of conservatism running through its higher echelons, the influence of old hands, such as Mikami-san and Funamizu-san, is clearly having an impact on creative output. But don't expect the legacy of *Street Fighter* to disappear just yet.





It's hoped that the cut-scenes and narrative will stick closely to the mood of the comic books. All characters can unleash a Stand – an alter ego even more bizarre than the outer personality. Conflicts are likely to veer towards the ridiculous, though special attack lists have yet to emerge





Photography: Nick Wilson

Inside…

Lionhead Studios

What do you do when you finish coding one of the most widely anticipated videogames of all time? Simple. You start work on another six

All the quotes in this article – except for one – are from Lionhead boss, **Peter Molyneux**. You probably know Molyneux. He's been in **Edge** before. He's not the only person **Edge** talked to on its game-by-game tour of Lionhead's Guildford studios but all but one of the quotes are from Molyneux because he has a lot to talk about, and tends to eclipse everything everyone else says with hyperbolic enthusiasm. And he talks about things he knows he shouldn't talk about, too; he can't help himself, because he's excited about them. Like when he talks about *Creation*.

"Oh, there's always been a *Creation*," he says coyly, referring to the temporary codename that he passes from project to project. "And there still is a *Creation*. There's a codename *Creation* which I can't talk about at all."

Now, **Edge** isn't here to talk about *Creation* – *Dimitri* to its friends – but Molyneux's enthusiasm puts agendas to one side, and Cathy Campos, Lionhead's PR, has to shoot across a disapproving glance to kill the line of questioning. **Edge** doesn't say anything, just raises an eyebrow. But the glance works. He's not saying anything more. Yet.

So, Peter, when **Edge** interviewed you five years ago, you said you'd be disappointed if *Black & White* took longer than two years to make. And…?

"I was disappointed." He shakes his head. "*Black & White* was completely and utterly exhausting, and it came out and it had bugs in it, and of course we weren't… I wasn't as happy as I thought I would be with it because of those bugs. So we all had a rest, came back, and decided that we wanted to expand; to keep the satellites we have at the moment, focus on their games a bit more, but also start a new project with the team that did *Black & White*."

Pause. Change direction. There's too much going on here these days, you see.

"I say the team that did *Black & White*; about a third of that team has now gone off and started another satellite called Black & White

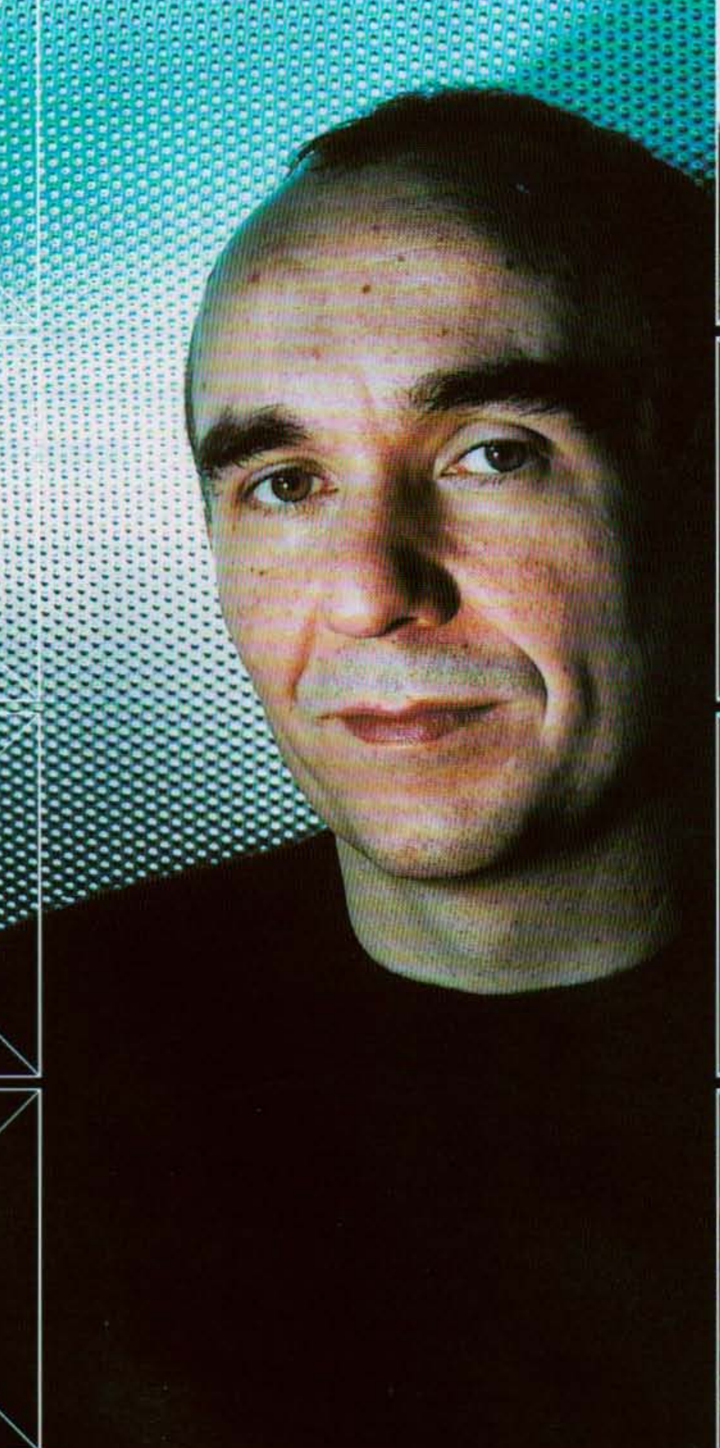
Molyneux on testing

"A lot of the work is done by kids who come in every week. We've got this scheme which we've always, always done, where we get kids in and they play the games, in whatever guise. I mean, they'll be playing *The Movies* within two weeks. We've done that ever since Bullfrog, and I just keep walking in there and seeing if they look bored, and if they look bored then you're doing something wrong.

"We've had some very unlikely people in there. We've had Americans, Australians... when we were doing *Black & White*, I came in to work and a huge chauffeur-driven Mercedes drew up. This bloke stepped out, immaculately dressed, in a designer suit, and he looked like this enormously wealthy individual. I walked across, and said, 'Can I help you?' and he replied, 'I'm here to do a week's testing.' He was the son of one of the 20 richest people in the world, or something, and he'd flown over from New York to playtest our game.

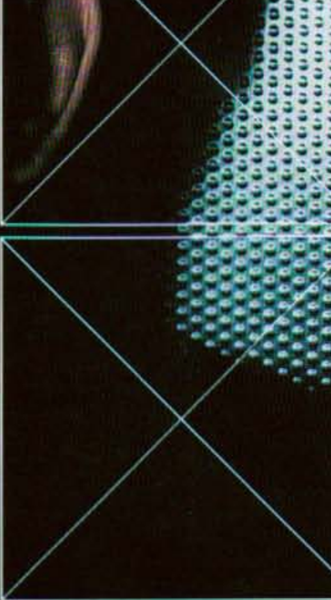
"Anyway, he playtests the game, and at night he goes out into Guildford, and gets drunk, and meets this girl, and suddenly thinks that this is where life is. That Guildford... that everyone's so genuine, and they don't care about him for his money, and he says, 'Right, I'm going to move here.' I mean, the guy was great, but he wasn't really a tester, and we didn't have a job for him, and it was a bit ridiculous – I mean, he could buy Lionhead ten times over. He stayed for about a month, but eventually he went back. It was bizarre.

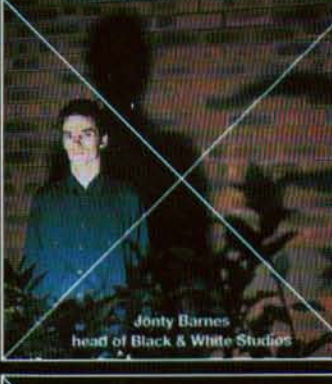
"A lot of people come through the testing programme, though, and end up working here every week. Like Jonty and Adrian. Mainly because they've got the time, and they're willing to come and sleep at the YMCA. It's completely word of mouth – from all over the world, Australia, America – last week we had someone from Austria, someone from France – and there's now a two and half year waiting list."





Adrian Moore
project leader, *The Movies*





Jonty Barnes
head of Black & White Studios

FAQ

Company name: Lionhead Studios
Founded: 1997
HQ: Guildford, Surrey
Number of employees (inc. satellites): 107
Softography: *Black & White* (PC), *Black & White: Creature Isle* (PC)
Projects in development: Lionhead – *The Movies* (PC), *Creation/Dimitri* (TBA); Black & White Studios – *Black & White NG* (PS2, Xbox), *Black & White 2* (PC); Big Blue Box – *Fable* (Xbox); Intrepid – *BC* (Xbox).

Studios, and the head of that is Jonty Barnes. I've worked with him since he was 15, and he was programmer on *Black & White*, and *Dungeon Keeper*, and various other Bullfrog titles. What we're going to see there is *Black & White* on the consoles, *Black & White Next Generation*, which is *completely* different to the PC version – it's not a port, it's an adaptation."

More similar to *Doshin the Giant* than the original *Black & White*, *Next Generation* gives thirdperson control over the creature, and focuses on its ability to 'tag' villagers. The more villagers following the creature around, the more powerful he is; the more powerful he is, the faster he grows; and the more he grows, the more things he's able to do.

Fifteen minutes

"It's a totally new game," stresses Molyneux again. "It was originally just going to be a straight port, but then we started wondering if we were trying to make something that just wasn't possible to do, or even desirable to do. Lots of console gamers just want to play for 15 minutes; *Black & White* depends upon you playing for hours, and you just can't write a console game that forces people to sit and play for that long. So that change has been made. You can still do a lot of the things you could do in the original game – for example, make disciples, although it's the creature who makes disciples now, because there's no hand in the game at all. But it's much more episodic, because that's really what a console game has to be."

Unsurprisingly, Black & White Studios has been working on *Black & White 2*.

"Part of it we've got from listening to people who played *Black & White*, from bulletin boards and fansites, and partly from thinking what we could do that would be sort of revolutionary. But there was always this plan with *Black & White* to take it through five versions, from the very primitive times up to a more modern era, when gods aren't needed so much, when not so many people believe in them. *Black & White 2* is the first step towards that. The whole world that you left is now at war, and all the little people have interpreted whatever they wanted to interpret, and ended up fighting against each other. We've focused the technology on making sure we can have hundreds and thousands of these little people all battling on the top of hills, because I think that's a really nice thing. And then you as a god can choose to either promote war, and encourage it, and make sure that it's the most warlike world possible, or to try and dissuade them, to pacify them. It's a lot clearer, the difference between black and white."

At this stage it's mostly concept work – so *Black & White* fans shouldn't expect anything any time soon – but, while the team know better than to even vaguely point at release dates these days, it'd be fair to say it shouldn't take four years. After all, this is a very definite sequel, with similar focus and technology.

"So, there's war going on, and you can build cities, and divide cities by walls, have archers and so on, and those cities will then be attacked by other tribes who don't believe in you. I think it's an interesting focus. Obviously there's still stuff with the creature – you can now clothe him, give him tools to use, so we've got a bit of a step up there. And the engine's very different as well. It's about 16 times more beautiful – I can say that, because the resolution has improved by that much."

Then there's *Project Ego*, at Big Blue Box. Deep breath from Molyneux. Nervous giggle.

"Looking at *Project Ego*, and what it can become... um... now I've said a stupid thing, which is just insane and I don't quite know why I said this, it just tripped out of my mouth, but our bold claim, is, and you're just gonna rip this to shreds, is that... *Project Ego* will be... the greatest role-playing game ever."

Okay.

"It's going to be an 11," he adds, perhaps deciding that the first statement wasn't quite bold enough.

So, any problems on the road to divinity?

"The thing that we're struggling with at the moment is the enormous amount of content that has to go into the story, just giving it variety, and that's an unbelievable amount of work. You should be able to play bits of the game again and again and still be surprised – it should let you feel you're able to experiment, let you try things out without feeling that you're forced to. I think technically *Project Ego* has an amazing engine, and it can do amazing things with morphing, and with the landscape, and the simulated world is fantastic, and the competitive element in the game is really nice. But all of that will be nothing compared to having the story in there."

A story which has one kid fighting unspecified evil in a automaton-filled world oblivious to the dark machinations of its coders? Apparently not...

"You're not the only hero in the world. This bizarre thing in RPGs is that your character seems to be the only person that realises the world's about to come to an end, and everyone else is just wandering about doing their thing, unaware that something cataclysmic is about to happen. Having other heroes in the world means you've got competition to be the greatest hero of all time. So you can go to a village, speak to someone, and they'll tell you there's a princess in a tower up on the hill – and you look up there, and you see Eric the Slayer already there, posing."

Which isn't to say your character won't have the opportunity to show off.

"Because you're a hero, you become more and more renowned. So you walk into a town, and there's all these kids who've cut their hair in the same style as you. And when you're









The top render is taken from *Black & White 2*, and shows a fur-shaded creature coming under fire from the newly armed villagers; the second mockup of their village reveals new levels of detail. The third shot is from *Black & White NG*, in which the player controls the creature and leads by example. Finally, the bottom screengrab gives a glimpse (without lighting effects) of the *NG* landscapes





BC's freeform but fantastical human-vs-dinosaur world enables players to lead and live out their own personal 'what if?' evolution theories, claims Peter Molyneux





Two new shots of *Fable*. Molyneux remains coy about the online aspects, claiming they're waiting to see what's possible on Xbox Live before announcing any support

wandering round the world there's always an opportunity to pose for heroic shots."

Presumably that accounts for the *Project Ego* moniker?

"Well, it's actually going to be called *Fable*. You might remember there was a previous game called *Fable*, mid-'90s..." Erm... "No, it wasn't all that good. *Project Ego* was going to be called *Aegis*, which is the name of a condom in Europe. So we had to pull back from that one. Quite literally."

Very good. Next.

"And then there's *BC*, which is being developed at the other satellite. It's set in prehistoric times, and the key thing about it is that it's going to be goriest, bloodiest, most savage game ever conceived. You get to kill dinosaurs. And when you kill a tyrannosaurus rex – which is how I imagined a t-rex to be when I was 12, not the half-grown chicken I found when I went to the Natural History Museum and saw the skeleton – there's going to be a swimming pool of blood." He grins.

Tag team

BC opens with a shot of prehistoric humans huddled in a cave, not knowing where their next meal is coming from. Essentially, you play their intelligence – choosing a character to play, and then leading the others in a quest to out-evolve all the other tribes. Like *Black & White NG*, *BC* lets you 'tag' characters and have them follow you. Perform an action while you're being followed, and your tribesmen will do the same; untag them while they're doing it, and they'll continue to build, harvest berries, fight dinosaurs, or whatever, until you order them not do. **Edge** watches one of Lionhead's testers take a caveman, dirty low-slung pants and sumo belly, and run him between the legs of a t-rex. The scale of the world, the detail in the texturing, the animation; all these things impress, but it's the freedom that Molyneux hopes will really mark the game as special.

"If while you're wandering round the world you see a bone on the ground, it's you, the player, who says, 'Hang on, I can use that as a weapon.' If you've ever wondered what you'd change if you could go back in time to prehistory... that's *BC*'s hook."

Oh. And the violence, of course.

"When you kill that dinosaur," Molyneux points at a t-rex the size of a house – apparently not close to being one of *BC*'s largest creatures – then towards a beautiful natural waterflow below it "this river will run red with blood." And if the dinosaur gets hold of one of your tribe? "If he does get hold of a human, he'll eat it in a savage, brutal way."

Ah.

"The first thing you do is move them around, take them out of the cave onto this clifftop. And below you lies this vast plain just full of every conceivable dinosaur. If you imagine the scene from 'Jurassic Park,'" he



The dinosaurs in *BC* are huge – this one is a fraction of the size of the bigge – but it's the scale of the environments and the minor details that impress

sweeps a hand out in front of him, indicating the vast landscapes that the early versions of *BC* already contain. "When you look down there are two things that occur to you. One is, 'My God, there are a lot of things there that are gonna eat me,' and two is, 'My God, there's a lot of violence going on down below,' classic dinosaur fights."

The *BC* demo ends, and **Edge** moves on. Molyneux keeps talking.

"What we're left with at Lionhead are the people who worked on *Black & White*, and a few more smart people, working on a game called *Dimitri*..." **Edge** feels the PR flinch, "... which I can't say anything about, apart from that it's infinitely more ambitious than *Black & White* was."

Does that mean it'll take infinitely longer to come out? Cathy Campos giggles nervously. Peter takes the hint.

"It could take... no, I'm not even going to attempt to say how long it'll take. It could take a long time."

So, bearing in mind you can't say anything about it, what are you working on at the moment, then?

"The technology we're working on is the animation, visualisation stuff, but there's also lots of AI stuff, real AI, not smoke and mirrors AI, and that makes it very ambitious. And it's a setting you would never, ever have predicted from a game that I'm involved with."

Edge makes to guess.

"Whatever you're thinking..." Peter teases.

The silence holds. Any more information? No, not yet.

"And then the last game, which is why Adrian's here, listening to me drone on," Molyneux glances across, and **Adrian Moore**, who has been quiet throughout the interview, smiles, "is *The Movies*."

Molyneux continues. "The story behind *The Movies* – and this is the first time this has happened to me – is amazing. When you do



games, there's a process that you go through, and it's long, drawn out, painful, and it takes about six months before you even see one line of code. *The Movies* was different."

He takes up a storyteller pose.

"It was 5 o'clock, in the morning in the middle of January. I woke up and I just had this game idea, and it was so clear that I got up, wrote the design on a single piece of paper, because it's such an simple design, and then I got into the office, told Cathy, told a few other people, and then I said 'Right. Three weeks' time I want a team working on this game.' And it's the first time I've ever done that, and the first person I told was Adrian."

Moore smiles again. He's still unable to get a word in edgeways.

"Adrian and I have known each other for a very long time, and we always talked about doing a game together. That's this game. It's about running a movie studio. You've got to take a studio up from the 1920s up to some future time, and you decide what movies to make. You get slightly involved with making the movies. You decide what developments are going to happen within the industry, a little bit like a management game. And that's it: it was such an easy concept to explain.

"My big thing, and I can show you this for every game I've ever worked on, is, if I can't sum up everything in one page then it's overcomplex. You design a theme park, you play the bad guy in *Black & White*, you play a god in *Populous*. It's very clear. And if we want to get more people in this industry, if we carry on making incredibly complex games, it's not going to happen. And you can see it in Japan – *Ico*, for example, goes right back to basics. Boy and girl escape from castle. Those clear focuses... there's so many of them."

The Movies is one of them. The player starts with a single movie lot at the start of 1920, and commissions a writer to produce a script. Molyneux waves vaguely in the direction of Moore, who's now paging through mocked up screenshots of virtual movie lots.

"This is your backstage lot, and you're responsible for deciding how many of these to build. You're also responsible for your stars, and they're a bit temperamental. You build your lot so your studio can specialise in westerns, or science fiction. If you build a western set, you can just build one. If you build a sci-fi set you've got to keep building it again or it'll look naff after a little while. And once you've built it, once the movie kicks off, you'll see it being shot, the whole time, if you want to. Although you can't adjust the cameras or anything."

But you do have control over each movie's content, via a complex system of sliders.

"You're breaking scripts down into simple categories – how much horror, comedy, violence – and then you have a theme, and a slider on each of those values. And that decides whether or not, if you have a romantic western, you're going to get anyone shot; it'll just be a man and woman walking up and down the street. If you have a violent one, there'll be people jumping off the buildings."

So, it's simple. Write a decent script, hire the right actors, give the film the right budget, and it's going to be a successful movie. Create a successful movie, and you'll have the money to expand your studio for the next one; to hire better actors, bigger sets, more expensive productions, and to throw money into technological advances. Like every decent management game it's based around what people think they know.

"People know how movies work, and that's what makes it the perfect simulation. Well, actually, the thing about how *Theme Park* works is that you don't want to simulate a theme park, you want to simulate what we believe a theme park is, and that's the same things with movie studios. And there's some really nice stuff that we can't show you – because we're using some of the stuff from our other project – where you get to see trailers of the movies you make."

Other project Peter? What's that, again?

"The only thing I can tell you about *Dimitri* is that there is sex in it. You do get to snog someone, and that goes to its logical conclusion, much like a film does. I'm not saying you're going to have any cum shots, but..." Double take. Apparently there *is* such a thing as too much information. "It's all in the best possible taste. In how many games has there ever been anything like a kiss?"

Well, there's the romantic element in *The Movies*, of course. Tasteful, one presumes?

"Well, if you try and turn the erotic element up to maximum in 1920, your studio will become known as a porn studio, and it'll be closed down. But if you think 'Right, we're ready for the first screen kiss,' and you edge the slider up a little bit..."

And then, finally, a different voice. "That's what you're trying to do – you're trying to push the boundaries," says an ebullient Moore, spying an opportunity and taking it. He's talking about succeeding in his game, but also neatly summing up Lionhead's philosophy. Molyneux nods. That's it. He doesn't appear to have anything else to add.

"Now I've said a stupid thing, and I don't quite know why I said this, but our bold claim is that... Project Ego will be... the greatest role-playing game ever"









The Movies **is based on a simple premise, and its success is likely to depend on how few restrictions the team place on the player's creativity. The mockups above reveal a welcoming, real-world aesthetic, and an interface coded for console gamers can only broaden the game's appeal**





Artificial Intelligence

The attempt to mimic human behaviour with computers has offered something of a Holy Grail for scientists and programmers alike. But, argue many developers, such expensive and time-consuming goals have no place in modern game craft. Often, smoke and mirrors offer a better solution

Artificial intelligence is big business, both within and outside the gaming world. Claims of neural networks and adaptive learning are an inevitable part of games hype, and in scientific circles, too. AI still brings in the money. The Long Bets Foundation, established by Well (Whole Earth 'Lectronic Link) founder Stewart Brand and 'Wired' editor-at-large Kevin Kelly in April 2002, takes long-term bets on some of the biggest scientific conundrums of our day. One of the big wagers – $10,000 – is on the Turing test, a setup in which, via a text-only interface, a human operator has to distinguish between a computer and another human using only their responses to his questions.

Ironically, it might not be the under-funded academics who have the best chance of winning the prize. In the half century since Alan Turing first posed the puzzle, it is the games companies who are staying truest to the test's spirit. The Turing test wasn't about turning computers into models of the human mind: it was about tricking someone into thinking they were dealing with an intelligent agent. And that's what game AI is about, argue some of the industry's top developers. Weary of the hype around game AI, developers and coders are beginning to revolt against the latest jargon and overblown claims about agent intelligence, and demanding a return to what makes games agents great: smoke and mirrors.



Jason Kingsley, co-creator of *Aliens versus Predator*, believes that intelligent buddy AI is reasonably simple to code, but it's the unpredictable AI that takes the real effort

"Making AI for games isn't about making the bad guys as good as you can – it's about making the game as fun as possible," says **David Braben**, developer of *Elite* and founder of Frontier Developments. "The game is not being competitive with the player – the game is entertaining the player. It's a subtle distinction. The game is there for the player to have fun, so the designers need to tease the player, keep them guessing. In *Elite*, there were special cases: if an enemy had low energy, it would roll dice, and maybe run away. Or another one, if they were low on energy and you shot them, they might use their escape capsule. Or if you fired a missile, they might randomly use their ECM. The intelligent thing to do would be to use the ECM, as soon as you fired a missile – but that wouldn't be fun. These tricks conspire to give the impression there is a player in the other ship."

It seems the concerns of good game AI have hardly changed since the *Elite* days. **Warren Spector** says, of his two new projects based in the *Deus Ex* and *Thief* universes, "In combat, you want to challenge players but, ultimately, the AI should lose the battle. If you've done your job right, the player has one bullet left and is dripping with actual sweat, but feels powerful, cool and victorious."

Paul Tozour, AI programmer at Ion Storm, agrees, "Sometimes the best AI is the kind of AI that allows itself to be fooled. For example, imagine an AI is chasing you, and you run down a hallway, open a door, and then run off in another direction. When the NPC comes to the door, it makes sense for him to say, 'Aha! He must have gone that way,' and run through the door. You want AIs to be fallible, but fallible in a way that's convincing, and seems to mimic human fallibility."

AI

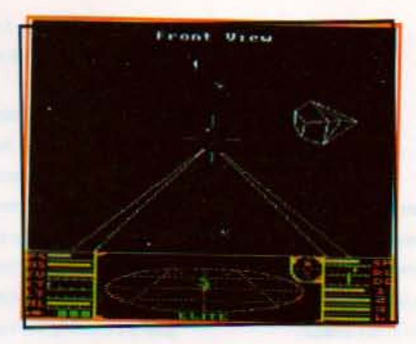
"Dogs on the other hand take a direct path fo their goal. If you wrap a dog's lead around on tree and then another, then put some food dow the dog will choke to death trying to get t the food, rather than unwind itself and ea

The balance between skill and vulnerability isn't only hard to strike when designing opponent AI. "Buddy AI," sighs **Jason Kingsley**, co-founder of Rebellion. "My problem with Buddy AI is that they are either really good, in which case you might as well not be there; or, they're awful, in which case they might as well not exist. Imagine an action film, where the hero charges into the room and everyone's already dead; he runs on and every room he goes into, all the aliens have already been killed; the galactic battle has already happened. It might work as a parody, but it wouldn't work as an action film. If you watch real people play *Aliens versus Predator* cooperatively, some people are just daft and they get in the way. There's nothing you can do about it. Some players even enjoy getting in the way. And if human beings aren't intelligent enough to coordinate and cooperate, then how are you going to code for it?" **Gary Penn**, product architect at Denki, agrees. "We already know how rubbish and annoying real players can be – too good or too bad, too self-motivated – so the last thing I want is realistic artificial players. I want big lies I can believe in."

In fact, "AI is not a term we use," says Penn. "You always take the cheapest option. In other industries, they are aware there's no point in complicating things unnecessarily. Where you have entities interacting in a world, you can often use your physics system to handle many of those interactions." Sometimes bad or random AI can make the game much better. "*GTAIII* didn't have very complicated AI at all," Penn remembers. "Just very good route finding. We found it was faster to cheat than to calculate something completely. It's the art of illusion. The very fact that you are playing something virtual that pretends to be a physical world, is an illusion. Why then is there this need to pretend everything's done properly?

"Intelligence doesn't necessarily mean fun," he continues. "Baddies in films are thick. They have to be thick, so they can make the hero look like a hero. Same with games. They have to be thick, and they have to be paying you attention."

Conversely, Penn recalls working on DMA Design's *Wild Metal Country*, a tank game which, he says, "had great AI, but you would never know. We had a very clever entity behavioural management system, they did learn and respond, the tanks were trying to trap you in a pincer movement, etc – but the problem was, the player had no idea what was going on."



Shoot a missile at a ship in *Elite* and it would 'roll dice'. The random reactions went a long way towards creating the impression of intelligence at the helm

Dumber and dumber

"AI is usually important to us," says Kingsley. "But it can't be the be-all and end-all. People bang on about AI as if it was a saviour. It's just like technology, it can help but it can't save your game. We're not making technology demos, we're making games. AI must be the servant, not the master. In *Aliens versus Predator*, we created some excellent AI – but they ate you alive. The aliens would team together and just destroy you every time. We had to work at making it dumber."

David Braben points out that AI programming is often exclusively the domain of the hard coding team, whose priorities might be different to those of the games designers. "One of the dangers is that quite a lot of programmers are frustrated scientists, and want an excuse to experiment with massive neural nets, etc. I see a lot of very ambitious games design. I worry about games like *Revolution*, with all those agents wandering around. Demis Hassabis gave a talk on the *Revolution* AI, it seemed to me to highlight a lot of the difficulties with sophisticated AI. Developers make a rod for their own backs. You see it so often, programmers have something to prove. Most of the time it crops up early in development, though, and it's worked out in the end."

Richard Evans, head of AI at Lionhead, says there are plenty of games "where the ambitions of AI stopped the game being released. *Battleship 2000* was going to learn neural networks, and never made it. A lot of games with ambitious AI don't reach the market."

"Emergent behaviour from an AI system is often considered as a laudable goal," says **Ray Muzyka**, producer of *Baldur's Gate* and co-CEO at Bioware, "but there are very few games that have pulled it off successfully. It takes a lot longer to test a game of this nature, since you have to ensure that the AI doesn't get into a degenerate state."

The goal of games AI often seems to be to produce behaviour that surprises the coders themselves – by coding in the basic motivations of the agents – but, says Penn, "Sometimes you don't want to lose track of exactly what's going to happen."

As we explored in **E**109, games developers and academics are beginning to acknowledge their debts to each other – and AI is one of the areas of games development where the connections with academia are perhaps the most deep-rooted. Back to the Turing test: even at the roots of what **Margaret Boden**, professor of AI at Sussex University has called "Good old fashioned AI," is this attempt to fool the observer into ascribing intelligence into computed agents. The advantage games have over real world research is that in our virtual worlds, our range of responses are vastly limited. **Alex Whittaker**, senior AI programmer on *Republic* at Elixir, remembers his last game, *Team Buddies*, a PlayStation title sold heavily on the merits of its AI. "In *Team Buddies*," he says, "you could refer to agents, vehicles, crates, and that's about it. Agents are able to shoot crates, pick them up, kick them, and jump over them. Because there are so few things to think about, passing the Turing test is easy." In fact,

David Braben on Elite

"One of the things we did in the early days of *Elite* was create this very sophisticated AI for the baddies, where they would watch your path, guess when you would turn, etc – and they were just too good. It was like a real space battle would be: there were these dots of light in the distance, and they shot you to pieces. So in the end we changed it. We made the AI very simple. The enemy ships would stop, turn, fire until you're close, turn, and run away. Which meant you could see the ships up close, which looked good, and it was easy to get behind them and into a chase scene, which we thought was much more dramatic, much more fun. The AI was trivial, in the end. The same thing happened with *Virus*, the AI started off much better than it was in the actual game. We had to tone it down, otherwise the AI in the attractor sequence would play through the whole game every time, making no mistakes. There would have been nothing left for the player to discover."



Baddies in games can be thick to let the player feel like a hero. Good route finding instead of complicated AI paid dividends in the brutal *Grand Theft Auto III*

Whittaker believes the Turing test is a red herring. "It hasn't done AI any favours. In the Turing Prize [a yearly occasion when scientists gather to try to pass the test] they're always trying to spoof it to win. They're always trying to trick you. That's not AI."

Whittaker believes that to find an example of real artificial intelligence in computer games, you usually have to look at classical games, "like chess, where the opponent has a representation of the rules and goals of the game, and comes up with a strategy. In games, no one is trying to do that." Still, Whittaker says that *Revolution*, Elixir's current project, does utilise traditional AI techniques; augmented transition networks, traditionally used for natural language processing, are used in the game to generate route-finding behaviour. He points out this is a new use of the tool – having published a paper on the subject for an intelligent agents conference – but is quick to point out that the concepts themselves are tried and tested.

It isn't always the games companies playing catch-up. Kingsley remembers a visit from an Oxford University student with a DPhil in AI Computation. They showed him some route-finding AI, and the DPhil didn't believe them. "He said, 'No, actually, you can't do that. I've been working on that problem for years. It takes a supercomputer to do that, and even then it takes over a year to complete the computation.'" Kingsley remembers, with obvious glee, "We told him, 'No, you're just bad at programming.' We looked at his code, and optimised it by about four thousand times. He was great at AI, but terrible at software."

As well as this resolutely practical focus, another advantage games developers have over AI researchers is that while the academic community is bred for scepticism, gameplayers want to believe. Kingsley recalls the convoluted motivations people were all too willing to ascribe to tiny block-characters in a game they experimented with for the Game Boy. "We'd get people saying how convincing the characters were, who blocked the corridors – how sometimes they would step to the side and dodge your bullets. In fact it was a counter, rolling a dice at random intervals. People are so good at recognising complex intelligent behaviour, they tend to see patterns where there are none. It's like looking at wallpaper, and seeing faces. We are built to recognise faces, and so we see faces in the wallpaper, same with recognising intelligent behaviour."

"If someone pays money," says Penn, "they want to be entertained. Normally players are too busy being distracted to notice complex AI. You can make a really complicated accurate module, and then make it shit, only why don't you just make it shit in the first place? Take the quickest route. In *Wild Metal Country* – it wasn't a fault of the AI or the AI code – but the most fun tanks were the Bull tanks, which drove straight for you."

"In *Team Buddies*," Whittaker says (the game was billed in promo material as 'AI – Added Incompetence!'), "We spent six months making the agents in the game as good as we could, then months making them do silly things."

Perhaps surprisingly, a game's genre can dictate much about the kind of AI tricks which do any good. "The firstperson perspective," says Whittaker, "hides an awful lot of behaviour. If guys are shooting you from behind, there's not a lot you need to know about where the bullets are coming from." Valve, *Half-Life*'s developer, gave a conference at Stamford, Whittaker recalls, "and the AI it showed was pretty laughable. But the illusion was complete. I admired the behaviour. It's a good sleight of hand. In *Team Buddies*, every enemy plays a strategy, but it's difficult to see it's a strategy. In an FPS, who knows?"

Tricks of the trade

Penn, too, cites *Half-Life* as a great example of very basic AI, but with convincing tricks that combine to give the illusion of real opponents. "The classic bit where they start to flush you out with grenades. You really believe, 'They're paying attention to me, they know where I am.' It works well. You start to read a lot into it because they are so effective."

Muzyka says these tricks are the main goal of games coding. "To paraphrase PT Barnum, it's easy to fool some of the people some of the time, and really this is the point behind AI systems. We've had reviewers on both of our action games [*MDK2* and *Shattered Steel*] and our roleplaying games [*Baldur's Gate*, *Baldur's Gate II* and *Throne of Bhaal*] who applauded our AI systems. In reality, the AI in all of those games was fairly simple scripting, but it created the impression of a deeper system, which was our intent. Let's say you see a creature attack the player, did the creature run through a huge neural network and determine that the optimal course of action would be to attack the player? Or was the creature prescripted to attack the player when it could see the player? Or, was the creature prescripted to move towards the player when the player steps on a specific point on the floor? The most

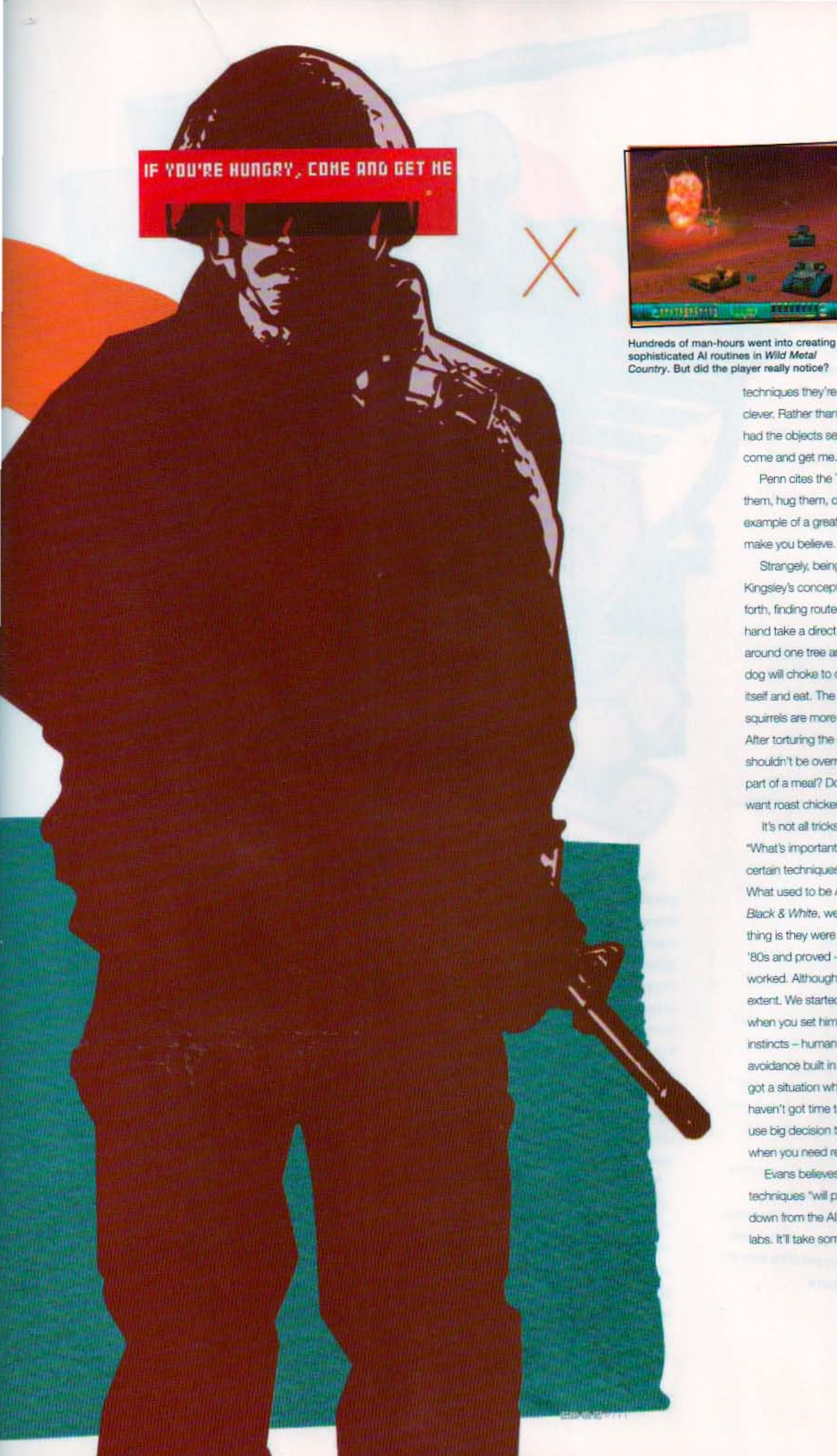


AI programmers admire the behaviour in *The Sims*. Rather than have the motivations set up in the agents, the objects constantly talk to the characters

The SOAR Quakebot

Developed by John Laird and his team at the University of Michigan.

"The aim of the SOAR project," says John Laird, "is to develop enemies for action games such as Quake that have many of the same capabilities as human players, including the ability to use many tactics, create internal maps of the level, and anticipate their enemy's behaviour." Alex Whittaker cites the SOAR Quakebot as an example of 'hard' AI being put to use in games. "After observing you entering a room with no exits and a rocket launcher in the middle," he says, "the bot will, after some playing time, know better than to run straight into the room, and instead will wait outside and ambush you on your exit. It plays a more surprising game, but not necessarily a better game."



Hundreds of man-hours went into creating sophisticated AI routines in *Wild Metal Country*. But did the player really notice?

important question to ask here is probably: does it really matter?"

Every developer has their favourite tricks in other people's games. Both Whittaker at Elixir and Evans at Lionhead applaud *The Sims*. "It's brilliant design and a brilliant program," says Evans. "The techniques they're using aren't very significant – but they're very clever. Rather than have all the motivation in the agents, they just had the objects send messages to the agents: if you're hungry come and get me."

Penn cites the Tamagotchi pets – where all you can do is feed them, hug them, or beat them as you choose – as a classic example of a great set of tricks that give you the right feedback to make you believe.

Strangely, being mean to animals also seems central to Kingsley's conception of AI. "Squirrels are used to going back and forth, finding routes through branches," he says. "Dogs on the other hand take a direct path for their goal. If you wrap a dog's lead around one tree and then another, then put some food down, the dog will choke to death trying to get to the food, rather than unwind itself and eat. The squirrel will go round. But does that mean squirrels are more intelligent? No. They just have different priorities." After torturing the creatures, Kingsley wants to eat them too. "AI shouldn't be overrated or underrated. It's like food – what's the best part of a meal? Do you want just vegetables? Or just meat? No, you want roast chicken with all the trimmings."

It's not all tricks and fast coding, though. Evans says "What's important is how we use the technology, but there are certain techniques that have moved from science to technology. What used to be AI is now part of life. When we did the creatures in *Black & White*, we did use some AI techniques, not just cheats. The thing is they were mature techniques, they had been done in the '80s and proved – the techniques were well understood. They worked. Although we did have to use tricks and shortcuts, to some extent. We started with a pure learning agent – the trouble was, when you set him on fire, he was fucked. So we put in some instincts – human beings don't learn from fire, they have fire-avoidance built in. It's all to do with self preservation. When you've got a situation where you need to make a decision quickly, you haven't got time to learn or use big decision trees. That's when you need reflexes."

Evans believes hard AI techniques "will percolate down from the AI research labs. It'll take some time to do

Gary Penn on Grand Theft Auto

"The AI in *GTA* was rubbish. The route finding was terrible. Initially, the police cars were quite clever, but it was boring. At one point in development a bug cropped up that made the police cars ram you up the arse – and it was much more fun. So we kept it in, for *GTA2* and *GTAIII*. To create that illusion, it's about the tricks you use to give the impression of intelligent responses. It was simple things in *GTA*, like horns honking in front of the player. People would think, 'Hey, they know I'm here.'"

so – maybe after ten years, once a technique is very understood, it will emerge in games." After all, he points out, "Object orientation, now commonplace, was invented in the research lab." Evans feels that ultimately it is the design concerns that determine how the AI should be used. "In *The Sims*, half way through chatting up the lady, your Sim might decide he's dirty and go to have a bath. It's the same in *Black & White* – your creature might be showing another creature his citadel, and decide to go to the toilet. The agents don't understand social processes, that it's rude to leave a conversation."

Penn agrees, "Usually the people who do the AI, no disrespect, are quite dull. They have a very different focus, on making it work, but less on the spectacle. It's got to be the show-people who make the most of the material – to make it fun."

Designer tools

Whittaker believes the real problem is that designers don't have access to the AI technologies, "There's not enough people writing middleware for AI." Whittaker says that in developing its new game, *Republic*, Elixir is working at doing exactly that, focusing the AI efforts on developing tools for the designers, rather than the behaviours themselves. "For what it's worth," he says, "I think the reason the perception of AI hasn't really advanced much in computer games, compared to graphics which are getting better and better all the time, is down to the development process. Artists are left to pursue their ambitions to represent things as they actually are.

The way AI is usually implemented, the designers make a specific story for the AI they want, and then the programmers simply either build it, or complain. We're starting from scratch, developing a toolset, a complex behavioural editor, which the designers use. They don't write a long document specifying the behaviour, they implement it themselves. It means people more capable than me are planting themselves at the feet of the agents, knowing how they want the agents to behave in context of the story and drama of the game."

Alex Whittaker, head of AI at Elixir, on The Sims

"In terms of a good implementation of behaviour using tricks, *The Sims* is a great example. It's a very strong implementation, but it's not AI. In a classical sense the agents in it don't have AI at all – the intelligent things are the washing machines and the toilets. They had a really clever idea: when you place an object in the game, that object includes all the code for how the agent interacts with it. So a refrigerator instructs the agent to eat, and even includes the code and animations for opening, getting food out, etc. You could give your Sim a guinea pig, and the guinea pig includes all the code for how you clean up the hut. If you don't clean up the hut, the guinea pig would get diseased, and that could give the disease to your agent – and all the code for the disease was part of the guinea pig add-on. It means that by continuously developing new objects in the game, they can expand agent behaviour indefinitely."

The focus of games AI should rightly be on the goal of games, to help the player have fun. Spector believes there is more work to be done here, in making sure games take you to the limit of your abilities, but no further. "One of the intriguing things in gaming, not just these days but for a while now, is dynamic difficulty setting. To be honest, I haven't noticed that approach paying off too dramatically when I've played games that claim to be tracking my play experience and adjusting gameplay on the fly. The quest for AI that fulfils one significant AI goal – challenging the player while ultimately losing – this seems like a fruitful avenue to explore."

But as AI techniques do develop, the repertoire of techniques available will inevitably expand. Just as long as those aliens don't get so good that we can't dispatch them back to their home planet with just a few guns and a can-do attitude. After all, getting invaded and not being able to do anything about it: that's just no fun.

■ Illustrations: Richard May at Pixelsurgeon Creative Cons



Half-Life was a step forward for convincing AI, but in truth, the behaviour was produced with a set of clever shorthand tricks

Edge's review policy

Every issue, **Edge** evaluates the best, most interesting, hyped, innovative or promising games on a scale of ten, where five naturally represents the middle value. **Edge**'s rating system is fair, progressive and balanced. An average game deserves an average mark – not, as many believe, seven out of ten. Scores broadly correspond to the following sentiments: zero: nothing, one: disastrous, two: appalling, three: severely flawed, four: disappointing, five: average, six: competent, seven: distinguished, eight: excellent, nine: astounding, ten: revolutionary.

Edge's PC is an Intel 1.7Ghz / 1 Gig RAM / GeForce3, kindly provided by iwantitnow.co.uk

Edge's most played

DDRMAX

Exactly the evolution that the series required. *DDRMAX* introduces the freeze arrow, and a genius techno version of 'Somewhere Over The Rainbow'.



(PS2) Konami

Jet Set Radio Future

"Yes, I am cooking for my son and his wife. It's his sityess birsday." And on top of the idiosyncratic rapping, there's the visceral glo-punk railsliding, etc.



(Xbox) Sega

Armored Core 2

If you fail to comprehend the superiority of a ZCL-XA/2 over a EXC-XR00 then *Armored Core 2* may not be for you. Others will delight in the endless tinkering.



(PlayStation2) SCEE

Halo: Combat Evolved

Legendary completed, it's now time to find your own avenues of fun. Though what the **Edge** editor sees in parking Warthogs on the beach is known only to him.



(Xbox) Microsoft

Bleeding Thumbs

Everybody hurts...

Most fans of 2D fighting games and shooters have experienced calloused thumbs from over-indulgence at one stage or another, but other games can prove even more brutal. Some three months after reviewing *Yanya Caballista*, Koei's abysmal cel-skating PlayStation2 game, one player's thumb still wrenched and cracked, especially during particularly acrobatic *Streetfighter* combos. The game came with a peripheral skateboard to fit across the DualShock sticks; to this day, **Edge** isn't sure if anyone other than its reviewer persisted with the agonising device.

A visit to Microsoft earlier this month revealed that the *Mech Assault* development team has deliberately lifted *Halo*'s control method button-for-button. They're quite right to do so; if there's one game the pad's tailored towards, it's Bungie's stunning FPS. But more importantly, perhaps, just about everyone with an Xbox will have played through *Halo* extensively, and so it makes perfect sense to make it easy for them. No one wants to relearn everything.

So why, then, does *Spider-Man*'s manual camera control – which is absolutely necessary, since the automatic tracking is fundamentally broken – not just move in the opposite direction to what you'd expect, but offer no opportunity to redefine it. *Nightcaster* made the same, frustrating, demoralising error, and all it does is turn players against the game. Of course, both games' problems run deeper than just control issues, but making things uncomfortable doesn't help, as *Dungeon Siege* producer Chris Taylor stressed to **Edge** in another meeting at Microsoft's Soho offices. The results are clear: his game does everything it can to invite, not exclude – to avoid the arcane interfaces that blight the genre – and the traditional headache of learning keyboard layouts is eased considerably.

Still, sometimes the pain is rather more voluntary on the part of the player. Another of **Edge**'s reviewers takes those *Halo* controls and stretches his hands across them in the most awkward formation, his middle fingers on the triggers and the side of his right index finger on the face buttons. It allows him to switch weapons, grenades and use his mêlée attack without taking his finger off fire. It is petrifying his hands into freakish claws, but he wins a lot at *Halo*. It's difficult to thwart that level of reaction-time obsession – just as it's difficult to stop indulging in callous-making twitch-gaming, as owners of *Shikigami No Shiro* and *Psyvaria* will know – but there's no reason to make things absolutely counter-intuitive.











Tekken 4

Format: PlayStation2 Publisher: Namco Developer: In-house Price: ¥6,800 (£36) Release: Out now (Japan), Q4 (UK)





The four-level Tekken Force mode has been spruced up with destructible scenery, 3D scenery and an enhanced system of power-ups, but it remains a clumsy distraction from the main game

Two years after *Tekken Tag Tournament* spearheaded the PS2's initial assault on the Japanese market, its successor (and first true sequel to the peerless PlayStation conversion of *Tekken 3*) has also come home – but oh, how things have changed. In the wake of the fanfare for the visual intricacy of *Dead or Alive 3*, the newsworthiness of Sega's flagship arcade franchise, *Virtua Fighter 4*, arriving on Sony's machine, and the underwhelming response to its arcade incarnation, *Tekken 4* faces the prospect of being a nonevent.

It's experimental – just a little; pretty – but not strikingly so; and, overall, a more solid and thoughtful proposition than its predecessor – but still not different or accomplished enough to threaten making much of an impact. As with *Virtua Fighter 4* and *Dead or Alive 3*, this latest *Tekken* is more a consolidation of past innovations than a revolutionary new step and as a trio, those market-leading hand-to-hand 3D fighters form a powerful case for the argument that the genre is running out of new gameplay avenues to explore.

Tekken 4 does implement significant gameplay changes, but to call them 'new' would be misleading. Its uneven floors resemble those of *VF3tb*, while its oversized arenas and interactive walls, fences and destructible décor recall those of the *DoA* series. The incorporation of these extended, interactive backdrops may be belated, and their integration is the defining feature of this instalment. In the jungle stage, tree roots provide a trench-like defence for the better-positioned combatant. During fighting in the underground car park, the roof-high walls can be a brutally effective accessory for the aggressor.

It's further evidence that the terminal limitations of the 3D fighter are already becoming apparent. The good thing is that it's difficult to care



The game's artists have taken care to indicate the passage of time and the scars of ill-fortune on the veteran fighters – but many famous faces must be unlocked via success with the curious default range





While rumbles in the jungle carry some impact, they have none of the grace of *Dead or Alive 3*'s balletic forest fighting

Changes elsewhere in the game system appear to have evolved out of this additional dimension, too: a reliable push move – often the last line of defence in a cramped, walled-in beating – is now to hand at the press of square + x, and the game's camera has a more sedate, less central focus now that it must see through scenery and manouevre around obstacles. Both function adequately enough, but don't always feel like worthwhile recompense for what has been lost, and – *Tekken 4* lacks much of the gladiatorial purity and intensity of the earlier versions' old-fashioned, flat-floored showdowns.

There's no true tag option this time, but Team Battle joins Arcade, Story and Survival modes and a relatively lavish – but ultimately mindless – 3D reprisal off the scrolling Tekken Force subgame from *Tekken 3*. Another bonus in relation to its arrival in the home is its origin in the System 246 arcade board. While PS2 *Virtua Fighter 4*'s graphical compromises rendered it a poor relation of the Naomi2 original, *Tekken 4* has arrived all but intact, and (on the default Smooth visual setting), effectively jaggie-free. There are none of the bifurcated arenas and few of the other rough edges that blighted *Tekken Tag*, and a new, rounded *Street Fighter EX*-like cartoon clarity to the game's visuals. There are some well-implemented reflections, shadows and smoke effects and more meaningful roles and behaviour for the crowing onlookers introduced in *Tag*, it never feels like a great leap: there are too many bland, flat surfaces and great lengths of grey wall and some character models appear less detailed than their *Tag* equivalents – but it's an understandable trade-off. What's less clear is where 3D fighters go next. How far can combatants be allowed to roam freely before man-to-man becomes hide and seek? How much interaction with scenery can realistically be expected before the genre's intensity gets sapped by having to navigate one too many pieces of furniture? *Tekken 4* is further evidence that the terminal limitations of the traditional 3D fighter are already becoming apparent. The good thing is that, when the latest specimen feels as over-familiar and curiously uninspired as *Tekken 4* does, it's difficult to care.

Edge rating: Six out of ten

Previously in E100









New moves add variety to the action but they're not enough to drastically alter fighting strategies









It's difficult not to compare *Tekken 4* to *VF4* and *DOA3* given that the three titles appear to share so many ideas, especially when it comes to themes for their combat arenas



Picture perfect

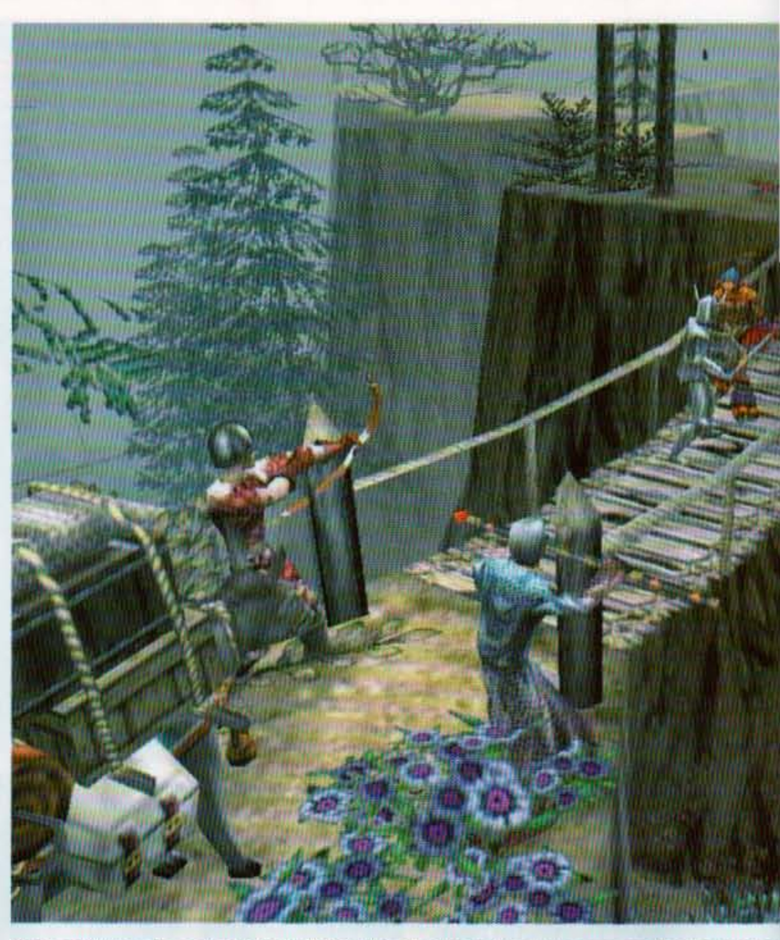
Tekken 4's character backstories are as complex and solemn as ever – with environmental destruction, world poverty and genetic modification all, naturally, looming large in the characters' motivations for attending the fourth Iron Fist tournament – but there's a fresh charm in their implementation for *Tekken 4*. Instead of the wall-to-wall hi-octane FMV associated with the series, *Tekken 4*'s prologues unfold via a series of beautifully-coloured, Capcom-style sequence of illustrations. And as ending movies are opened, the game's grand narrative backdrop gradually comes together, mosaic-like. Even if such features normally leave you cold, it's difficult not to admire the energy which has been invested in this episode.

Dungeon Siege

Format: **PC** Publisher: **Microsoft** Developer: **Gas Powered Games** Price: **£35** Release: **Out now**

Broadly speaking *Dungeon Siege* treads similar ground to two of Microsoft's Xbox titles, *Nightcaster* and *Azurik*. But both of these titles betrayed a misunderstanding of the console ethic; instead of accessibility and a carefully crafted simplicity, they offered a clumsy artlessness and a lack of subtlety. If Microsoft wanted to release a title that demonstrates an understanding of the art of console game design, it need have looked no further than *Dungeon Siege*. Although its constituent parts are ostensibly simple, they are adroitly integrated to build up a complexity that's masked by an elegant interface, producing a captivating and refined experience. Which is currently, perhaps surprisingly, only available on PC.

It's efficient rather than inspired, but it's no less engrossing as a result. And it would have been a better advert for Xbox than Nightcaster or Azurik



Critics of *Dungeon Siege* might point to the fact that almost everything in the game can be automated as a weakness. In fact, it's the strongest feature of the game, allowing players to adopt a more strategic role







The almost hypnotic appeal of *Dungeon Siege* derives largely from a perfectly balanced reward structure, which more than makes up for the game's linearity

It's also a significant technical achievement. Quite apart from the fact that it's a visually resplendent experience, it's perhaps most significant for featuring a massive game universe that's entirely devoid of any loading screens whatsoever. From the wooded glades at the start of the game, through dank caverns and snowy mountain-tops, and via the interiors of successive buildings, players are never subjected to any interruption from their engagement with the game world. The price for such continuity is a substantial degree of linearity, but a well-structured sense of pacing, and absorbing game mechanics offset any frustration at a sense of restricted freedom.

At their heart, these game mechanics are a delicate synthesis of elements borrowed from other titles. Taking obvious inspiration from games such as *Diablo* and *Baldur's Gate*, and applying its experience of the RTS genre, Gas Powered Games has wrapped them up with an interface that removes all of the difficulties traditionally associated with dungeon crawling. Almost everything can be automated.

Every character in your eight-strong party can be assigned a different type of AI to condition their behaviour in battle; party formation is easily altered; different types of attack can be cycled through; and in an inspired move, it's even possible to recruit a pack mule to shoulder the burden of your burgeoning inventory. Indeed, the developer has thoughtfully included a spell that converts items into cash for those moments when a store is too far away, which is a massive benefit for gamers with obsessive compulsive disorders (especially given that there are 1,000 items and 100 spells in the game).

Character creation and advancement is also remarkably painless. Characters increase in four types of skill (mêlée combat, ranged combat, combat magic, and nature magic) as a direct result of employing those skills. Thus by balancing all four types of activity it's possible to create a polymath, while restricting a character to, say, casting nature magic, will produce a specialist mage. Combat, too, is absolutely hassle-free, benefiting from a *Baldur's Gate*-style pause function to balance a straightforward RTS dynamic. It could be argued that the game is almost *too* automated, and it is frequently possible to sit back and relax, leaving your party to fend for itself, but this would be to miss the overarching strategic freedom that this type of play engenders.

In any case, if the lengthy singleplayer does fall short, there's also a substantial, and entirely separate multiplayer game to play through with up to seven other human players. And if that's not enough, the Siege Editor toolset is bound to result in an abundance of user-created material to hack, slash and zap your way through.

In all, it's a sizeable package. It's efficient rather than inspired, but it's no less engrossing as a result. And it would have been a better advert for Xbox than either *Nightcaster* or *Azurik*.

Edge rating: Seven out of ten

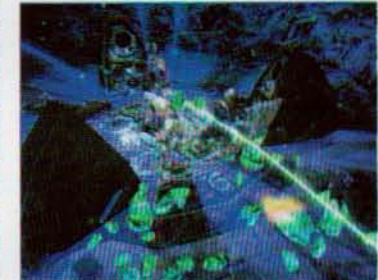


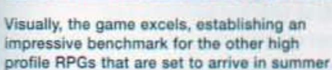






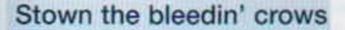






Visually, the game excels, establishing an impressive benchmark for the other high profile RPGs that are set to arrive in summer

Stown the bleedin' crows



Edge is sorry to have to bring this up again, but as long as US developers continue to hire voice actors that perpetuate the 'stoik 'n' kidney poi', Dick Van Dyke stereotype of English (mis)pronunciation, **Edge** is going to continue having to lament it. Granted, in *Dungeon Siege* there's only a wafer thin plot for poor voice acting to ruin, and given the slim amount of time given over to narrative incursions, it doesn't substantially detract from the constant flow of action, but it's still incredibly irritating.





The game never deviates from its pared down dungeon crawl structure, throwing wave after wave of increasingly nefarious baddies at players. Despite the repetitive structure though, the game never feels boring or uninspired, which is a testament to the developer's skilful and efficient, and indeed thoughtful, approach

Spider-Man

Format: **Xbox (version tested), PC, GC, PS2** Publisher: **Activision** Developer: **In-house** Price: **$50 (£34)** Release: **Out now (US), June 7 (UK)**

It's difficult to say how closely *Spider-Man* the game sticks to 'Spider-Man' the movie because, at the time of writing, Sam Raimi's celluloid interpretation of the comic book has yet to be released. Certainly it feels like a film at times; when you're slinging yourself across a cityscape, ricocheting off skyscrapers, trading quips and chasing after some superfiend. Or, thinking about it,

The first hour is painful, exacerbated by a dull first level that has you swinging from rooftop to rooftop and punching bad guys in the face









Rescuing Mary Jane, or any of the less gorgeous (but equally hapless) citizens means taking them to one of these bright shining target-style safety zones

maybe it's more like a cartoon – bright, beautiful, action packed, and utterly, utterly two-dimensional.

Except there isn't a cartoon in creation as disorientating as this. As a reviewer, pointing out problems with cameras in thirdperson games is standard enough practice, simply because so few developers get it right. Here, though, TreyArch has excelled itself, not just failing to get it right, but setting mind-blowing new standards in incomprehensibility. Blame that partially on the counter-intuitive control system; by the time you've finished the game (anywhere from five to ten hours, depending on how frustrated you get at the game's brief difficulty spikes) it's likely you'll still be fumbling for the right combinations.

It follows that the first hour of the game is exceptionally painful, exacerbated by a dull first level that has you swinging from rooftop to rooftop and punching bad guys in the face. Structurally it's nothing more complex than Spider-Man's early platform games – certainly nothing approaching the sharp, neat introduction of his first PlayStation appearance – but when you spend every fight in conflict with the camera as well as mindless clockwork thugs, the relative calm of New York is something of a blessing. It's a missed opportunity, though: the city is gorgeous, and to distract the player from the swooping, massive scale with monotony seems criminal.

The camera/control issues are highlighted when Spider-Man fights in confined spaces, which is probably why the developer appears to have set as many as possible of the interior battles in cavernous rooms. There's a joyous, fantastical feel to the colour and architecture sometimes, particularly when you're outside. And, given freedom for acrobatics, the game becomes



The showdown with the green goblin is mildly satisfying, but too empty, spacious without any sense of pace. The ability to lock the camera on an enemy makes combat much easier, but still tedious

genuinely enjoyable. But then it falls back on the old stalwarts, the obligatory sewer and warehouse levels, and you find yourself running towards the camera and trying to fight linear sequences of enemies you can't even see.

The combat, which is based around combinations of kick, punch and the web-shooter, is most similar in aesthetic to Bungie's *Oni*. Unfortunately, there's no block, and so none of *Oni*'s 3D fighting subtlety; and the wider game doesn't have any of *Oni*'s pacing or coherence either. Almost all of the levels are short and simple, rarely asking anything more than for the player to achieve a single minigame-style goal, surrounded by minor secondary goals that give score bonuses on completion. That's one thing *Spider-Man* gets right: rewarding masochistic gamers' quests for perfection by providing score-related prizes as incentive for replay.

And that's when the game is at its best, when it's in Score-Attack mode, behaving like an exuberant collection of minigames and challenges, when it forgets about the routine anti-gravity platform action it should be able to do so well, and leaves the plot advancement to the well-produced cut-scenes. Excellent scripting and voice acting (Tobey Maguire and Willem Dafoe reprise their movie roles, though Kirsten Dunst is sadly absent) prove time and care have been invested here, but the finished sheen has been blighted by some unforgivable stupidity at the design stage. The end result? That *Spider-Man* feels less like a movie and more like a trial. Not that **Edge** knows what the movie's like yet, of course, but if it's anything like the game, then it'll be spectacular, fractured, and ultimately disappointing.

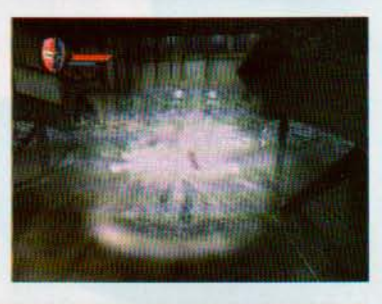
Edge rating: Four out of ten

...IS ABOUT TO GET EVEN BETTER

Previously in E106

















Swinging in mid-air across a city is initially spectacular, but eventually mundane – the vast environments make even top speed travelling seem slow. It's much better inside cavernous rooms, where the pace appears quicker, and where sceptics can't question the webline's sticking point

By pressing the web-sling button and right, Spider-Man forms a protective shield which detonates on command. It's the closest the game gets to having a block button, but it's absolutely no substitute for one: combat is all about positioning, and getting in blows before the enemies can

Medal of Honor Frontline

Format: PlayStation2 Publisher: Electronic Arts Developer: In-house Price: £40 Release: Out now

Figures popping in and out of the fog in the near distance, shots targeting enemies dead centre but failing to strike home, men running into walls in fits of delirium. It's all part of the confusion of war. Or perhaps it's just slipshod coding. For all the brilliant atmospheric touches which suffuse EA's fourth *Medal of Honor* title, there are just too many technical flaws to make it stand out in a genre which has become over-saturated in recent years.

As in 'Saving Private Ryan' the game throws the player into the thick of the action from the outset. Landing craft rumble ominously towards Omaha beach while bullets rain down from the German gun nests high up on the cliff face. A great sense of tension is generated before the landing is finally made. But once on the 'beach' the sense of space – and crucially, the illusion of taking part in something profound and epic – is quickly broken.

It's a tiny stretch of beach you are restricted to, and your tasks are clumsily prescribed (meet soldier A at point B) while other members of your unit follow preordained paths. It is testament to the excellent sound effects that some illusion of bloody war is maintained at all.

Much of the rest of the game follows this formula. Each level brings with it a set of objectives, but unlike *GoldenEye* (let's not forget that Rare's game is now almost five-years-old) the environments are much more limiting. Movement through towns is truncated by piles of rubble or flimsy fences and progress through the French countryside halted by nothing more than tall grass.

There's usually only one path to follow and enemies seem to react more to your movement across invisible checkpoints rather than your actual behaviour. Begin a level again and the opposition will appear at the same points and perform the same actions with mechanical predictability. (But maybe that's the Nazis for you.)

The game is not without some flamboyant moments – riding a mine-cart Indiana Jones-style comes to mind – but the open spaces, unpredictable enemy behaviour and general precision in more recent examples of the genre make *Medal of Honor Frontline* feel dated. FPS fans will still enjoy the ride but in terms of pure gameplay mechanics this is a very rusty clockwork toy.

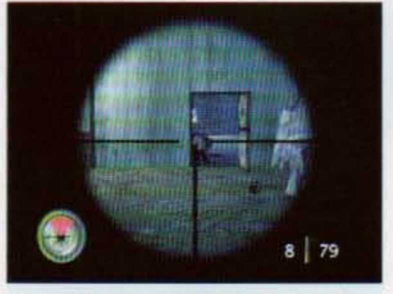
Edge rating: Five out of ten













Weaponry from the period has been lovingly recreated and includes Steilhangrenat (German 'stick' grenades), the Thompson submachine-gun and the Springfield sniper rifle. Reloading can take an age, so it's vital to keep a check on your ammo levels. If all else fails, there's a clumsy mêlée attack to fall back on



The death animations of the German guards are reasonably varied, but few improvements have been made since *Medal of Honor Underground*



Trigger happy

Mission objectives act as a triggers to open up further routes for exploration. These can range from the fairly imaginative (pulling levers to rotate a train turntable) to the ridiculous (kicking open a foot-locker to open a door to an armoury). Although later levels begin to open up, you never quite lose the feeling of being penned in.

Gun Metal

Format: **Xbox** Publisher: **Rage** Developer: **In-house** Price: **£45** Release: **Out now**

Previously in **E**103







Nobody does it better. And unfortunately for Rage, *Gun Metal* seems to prove the point that only the Japanese know their way around a mecha warrior. First impressions of its attempt to express the potency of a robot specifically designed to annihilate anything in its path are not promising. The sense of solidity and strength is poorly conveyed with your mecha, Gun Metal, coasting around the landscape with little indication of weight or robustness. Textures (which we've already come to expect as rich and detailed on Xbox) are bland and early strategies merely consist of strafing around enemies while pumping every weapon into their hulls.

Thankfully, matters improve and a greater sense of invention becomes evident as more missions are opened up. The ability to transform Gun Metal into a fighter jet is hardly an original idea but Starscream fans will appreciate the level of tactical depth this brings to the experience. Clearly, speed and manoeuvrability improve once you're in the air, but the shield which protects the bipedal form of Gun Metal is lost. This provokes quick and crucial decisions: stay in the air and take down targets with the jet's more explosive payload, or move to the ground to fight a more defensive rearguard action? It's a risk and reward structure which has been implemented well and remains finely balanced throughout.

While missions are varied enough to prevent repetition setting in too quickly, they do follow familiar videogame formulae. These range from defending your own HQ from marauding enemy bombers to preventing the launch of deadly missiles from distant missile silos. But just occasionally things become more interesting and dramatic. Enemy Motherships are particularly impressive, often eclipsing the skyline and providing a very challenging target for Gun Metal. Combat can be particularly satisfying and explosions are striking throughout, with ships smouldering in the air and debris falling theatrically from the larger aircraft.

However, *Gun Metal* has a rawness that threatens to spoil things. There's little context given to your sorties and the sense of purpose soon wanes. Slowdown is also evident during moments of intense action. As an arcade experience with OTT explosions *Gun Metal* works successfully, but the overall experience could have benefited from a bit more spit and polish.

Edge rating: Six out of ten



The fighter jet mode of *Gun Metal* may be more agile but it lacks a shield. Thankfully, shield recharge points can be found on many levels





Mother of God

As the name implies, the enemy Mothership is capable of releasing a number of troublesome offspring from its womb. Both tanks and bombers can emerge and it's essential to neutralise the threat before the smaller enemy forces overwhelm you. Targeting specific areas is vital for success and destroying the main energy core will power-down the Mothership's main shield. The resulting explosion after triumph is achieved is very rewarding.





Specific hit locations are highlighted by square reticles on the larger enemies (right). Each has a *Command & Conquer*-style damage meter which depletes as missiles slam home. Explosions can be satisfying (left)

Groove Adventure Rave: Fighting Live

Format: **GameCube** Publisher: **Konami** Developer: **KCEJ** Price: **¥6,800 (£36)** Release: **Out now (Japan), TBC (UK)**

Like *Super Smash Bros. Melee* and *Powerstone*, Konami's *Groove Adventure Rave* is superficially simple. Up to four players control a character in a small, flat, square arena. They attack each other. After some pressing of the block, light and heavy attack buttons, one remains standing, and that person wins.

And that's it, framed in Story, Free Play, and Versus modes. Weapons drop randomly into the arena, along with handfuls of status-effect power-ups. Some weapons work better in the hands of some characters; some characters are weaker against certain weapons. It's twitch-gaming scissors/paper/rock meets ultraviolent 'Tom and Jerry' slapstick. Fast-paced, immediate and slightly random. It's a comprehensive portrayal of a single, simple idea.

Unfortunately, while there's plenty to unlock – characters, artwork, game options – the game's initial superficiality is real; there's nothing beneath the surface, just fourplayer fun. It lacks the depths of even something as light as *Super Smash Bros. Melee*, and thus can only be recommended for those who disagree vehemently with **Edge**'s appraisal of Nintendo's super-simple multi-character beat 'em up.

Edge rating: Five out of ten









Twisting your character into an attacking position, and performing simple combos – light, light, light, heavy – increases your character's capacity to unleash special attacks, attacks which are more effective if the player is carrying the right power-ups

Britney's Dance Beat

Format: **PlayStation2** Publisher: **THQ** Developer: **Metro** Price: **£40** Release: **Out now** Previously in **E**108



The cleverly filmed 360-degree segments of concert footage available to unlock are nice bonuses, but hardly interactive entertainment; the ability to tilt the camera in any direction you choose doesn't really mean much when there's only one (well modelled) person you really want to look at







Charges of cashing in on brand names are often levelled at THQ, but in its defence, the principle here intrigues. Beats – essentially any of the DualShock's four face buttons – can lie at the eight major compass points of a circle in the corner of the screen and, as a sonar-style line sweeps past them, the player must press the appropriate button. Later levels throw in simultaneous d-pad presses, and opposing players (in both versus and singleplayer, because the 'audition' mode places you in a dance-off against extremely camp AI) can give you extra beats with unbroken combos, or switch upcoming symbols.

But the case for the prosecution is damning: chromatically obscured symbols, a dancemat mode that barely works on any level, a woeful number of songs (five) and, crucially, a rigid, formulaic structure far removed from the well-captured onscreen dancing. *Gitarooman*, *Shake It Bravos*, and *Dance Dance Revolution* all have vibrant rhythms tuned to the music. Britney's are stoic and arbitrary, which means there's no sense of reward or fun, just monotonous pattern cloning, far removed from Britney's licensed exuberance. Guilty, then? Well, not *that* innocent.

Edge rating: Three out of ten

Shikigami No Shiro

Format: **Xbox** Publisher: **MediaQuest** Developer: **Alfa System** Price: **¥7,800 (£41)** Release: **Out now (Japan)**

Part of Microsoft's Japan-only portfolio, it's unlikely *Shikigami No Shiro*, a vertically scrolling shooter ported from the arcade, will ever see a UK release. That's unfortunate, because it provides the sort of five-minute arcade-thrash quality that the Xbox line-up mostly lacks – albeit one that's over within an hour.

It's a familiar, accentuated caricature of a sh'mup: all-too-short, hyperactive sequences of bizarre invaders – ballerinas, teddybears, undetermined alien masses – are capped with longer wars of attrition against their bigger boss friends. Defeated enemies drop coins; coins power up weaponry; bigger weaponry defeats more enemies; everyone knows *that*, but there are two twists here. Fly close to enemy fire and your weapons power up briefly, meaning both the fortunate and the exceptionally daring will counter near-death experiences with powerful blasts of their own.

While the game itself is short, the multi-character variation, along with the traditional must-try-harder score/grade envy, means there's plenty of incentive for replay. Besides, unrestricted continues might make the ending visible to everyone, but the trick, and joy, is in getting there without them.

Edge rating: Seven out of ten









The other neat touch is the secondary weaponry (one example of which is visible as a ghost on the far), which slows the player character down to half speed but makes them a magnet for coins. Its form varies wildly among the six playable characters, and determines exactly how opponents are best attacked

Psyvaria Complete

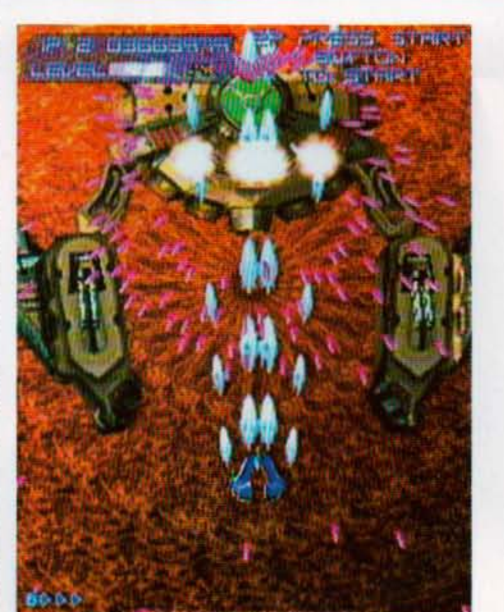
Format: **PS2** Publisher: **Taito** Developer: **Success** Price: **¥6,800 (£36)** Release: **Out now**







Bosses are predictably massive and aim obscene amounts of firepower in your direction. Brute force and stupidly honed twitch-gaming reactions are the player's most effective weapons



Spread fire is useful, but the rotate button both skips you quicker left and right and focuses your lasers on a single spot

Almost simultaneously, the arcade game that introduced the buzz system (*Shikigami No Shiro*'s 'tension' system is the same thing, with more instancy) arrives on PlayStation2. *Psyvaria Complete*, which contains both the original Medium Unit as well as the remixed (and easier) Psyvaria Revision, demands you *just* avoid dying in return for a higher 'buzz' level, while destroying improbable numbers of foes.

Powering up is less traditional than the inevitable wave-on-wave twitch-gaming explosions; the level of your ship increases in proportion to your buzz level and the amount of things you're destroying. If that level is high enough at the end of a section, bonus sections appear. Unusually, if you die you don't lose your firepower, but death does zero your buzz level, which means powering up again takes longer.

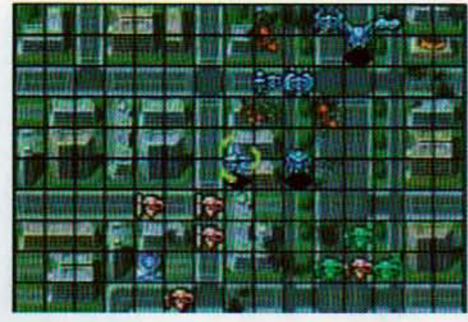
It's a compact and neat mechanic, requiring less strategy than its rivals but quicker reactions. That means it may appeal more to the hardcore – particularly those prepared to tilt their TVs and take advantage of the game's vertical display mode – but it doesn't offer the variation or extended thrills of *Shikigami No Shiro*, and thus succeeds less emphatically.

Edge rating: Six out of ten

Zone of the Enders: The Fist of Mars

Format: **Game Boy Advance** Publisher: **Konami** Developer: **In-house** Price: **$35 (£24)** Release: **Out now (US), June 7 (UK)**









Although the dialogue is rather convoluted, it is rather charming. It's also rather long, but it is possible to skip through, cutting right to the action. And though the action is brief, it's also pretty engaging stuff, with conventional turn-based strategy mechanics enlivened with realtime combat

The only common ground between *The Fist of Mars* and *Z.O.E.* on PS2 (a title that seemed to get noticed because of its association with the *MGS2* demo rather than its fluid mech combat) is that the two titles feature the same game universe. In terms of play mechanics, the GBA title is more akin to Konami's *Ring of Red*, in that it combines turn-based strategy with realtime combat encounters. It's also reminiscent of *MGS2*, because of the convoluted and frequently incomprehensible backstory (told via dialogue screens which, though lengthy, can fortunately be skipped).

Throughout its 25 missions, the game proves surprisingly satisfying. The missions derive some of their charm from a varied set of objectives and the distinct strengths of your predetermined selection of mechs, while the Interactive Action System (IAS), which allows realtime engagement with your foes, lends a welcome variation in tempo. The feature can be switched off, but this would be to slightly miss the point (as well as making your task slightly more arduous).

The Fist of Mars is short and not particularly challenging, but it's thoroughly engaging, and perfectly suited to a handheld platform.

Edge rating: Seven out of ten

Downforce

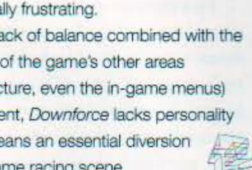
Format: **PlayStation2** Publisher: **Virgin/Titus** Developer: **Smartdog** Price: **£40** Release: **Out now**

Previously in **E**109

True to its name, the speed at which bends can be taken without losing traction in *Downforce* is fabulous. The game's intense pace – even more so than its great crashes – is the real attraction here.

The honeymoon period over, however, and one or two disturbing personality traits emerge. True, there's huge satisfaction in hooking up a perfect lap but the further you progress the less likely this becomes. Since **Edge** last saw it, the opposition now sticks together as a pack, thus promoting tight racing, even if their close proximity can occasionally feel overly artificial. And while you'll initially welcome their aggression – accidents resulting from a failed overtaking manoeuvre are the only potential obstacle to leading from the first corner to the finish line for the first two (very easy) seasons – in later championship rounds the opposition's clumsiness becomes phenomenally frustrating.

Regrettably, this lack of balance combined with the over simplistic nature of the game's other areas (handling model, structure, even the in-game menus) ensure that while decent, *Downforce* lacks personality and remains by no means an essential diversion to the current videogame racing scene.



Edge rating: Five out of ten









Downforce certainly has its moments – the track layout encourages you to commit to corners at ridiculous speeds. But as circuits increase in size and complexity, overtaking the opposition becomes an extremely risky affair. This is a shame as more development time could have made this very special. Twoplayer races are a lot of fun, though



The making of…

Driver

Borrowing heavily from 1970s car chase movies and contemporary cut-scene-led adventure games, Reflections' racer delivered on Sony's PlayStation promises and proved prophetic of next-gen GTAs to come. **Edge** digs

Original format: **PlayStation**
Publisher: **Infogrames**
Developer: **Reflections**
Origin: **UK**
Original release date: **1998**



Recently, it has become fashionable to denigrate the PlayStation. To claim its incredible success owes more to the Sony publicity machine than the quality of the software. To bemoan the wannabe-cinematic formula of cut-scenes, glitchy 3D and poorly selected camera angles that characterise so many mediocre titles released in the console's latter years.

Yet the PlayStation hasn't always been a rest home for staid franchises, and there was a time when the term 'cinematic' didn't seem quite so loaded either. *Driver* is a perfect example. It's derived from an ancient genre and it utilises a simple pick-up-and-play, drive-from-a-to-b mechanic. But add some super-stylised presentation, some '70s cool, some of that much fabled Sony PlayStation 'attitude' and the concept is transformed unrecognisably.

Reflections' founder and MD **Martin**



Each of *Driver*'s American cities has a unique atmosphere – a product of the many photographs taken by Reflections' location reseachers

Edmondson explains the game's genesis, "The idea for *Driver* actually came about during the development of *Destruction Derby*. I was messing about on one of the tracks called 'Crossroads', and thought it would be great to make a game, which was full of these crossroads and would let the player choose the direction he drove in. This rapidly developed into a 'car chase' game, as I had an unhealthy appetite for them as a kid." However, because Reflections was already contracted to produce *Destruction Derby 2*, the game's development was delayed. With unexpectedly positive consequences.

At the most base level, the elongated gestation time helped not only to hone Reflections' PlayStation expertise but to banish any lingering doubts that *Driver* would actually be possible on the console. Without that extra time, one of the Sony machine's flagship titles could have been PC only. "When we initially started hawking the idea around publishers and journalists we showed them a PC version… which gave rise to plenty of doubts whether the game would actually be possible on PlayStation hardware. A rumour which wasn't helped when we took a dev kit to E3 to show the PlayStation version to trade only for it to be destroyed during shipment."

Extra time

From a design perspective too though, the extra time proved beneficial. Having already mastered the PlayStation racer with the impressive *Destruction Derby* series, the Newcastle-based developer was determined to really push the genre forward. "We decided to do a story driven racer… we particularly wanted to avoid all the clichés like earning money for jobs, points for running down pedestrians and so on. We also wanted the feeling that you were solving something and hunting a person down. We wanted to enable complete changes of situation – sometimes you'd be blasting down the street and screeching in and out of traffic with cops on your tail; and at other times trying to cruise as unobtrusively as possible."

It pays to remember, that before *Driver*'s timely reinvigoration of the arcade racer the genre was suffering something of a malaise. Heading down a post *Gran Turismo* blind alley of air brushed cars with ever more realistic graphics and, um, ever more realistic handling. Hardly the most diverse future.

This dissatisfaction with the state of racing games led Edmondson and his team to draw inspiration almost entirely from TV and the movies. The '70s setting then, was a result of several factors. Firstly, the personal fondness for the decade of Edmondson himself. "Personally, I think the '70s is very interesting in terms of style… modern US cars are incredibly dull compared to the classic '70s muscle cars." The beautiful thing about the lopsided heavy gas-guzzlers of *Driver*'s world being that they are so much fun to drive. Because the cars are



by European standards hopeless, even the gentlest curve threatened to send you spinning into oncoming traffic. While it was also common to slip into slides which could only be driven out of with plenty of opposite lock and throttle application. Then there was the thick smoke of the multiple pile-ups and the hubcaps that pinged off with the slightest encouragement. And the repetitive "suspect heading north" speech. It's pure theatricality. And perfect for the PlayStation. Revelling in grease, fumes and crisis, *Driver* was clearly *Gran Turismo*'s wayward little brother.

Which brings us on to the second point about the significance of Reflections' use of cars from the '70s. It taps into the rich cinematic heritage of classic car chase movies such as 'Bullit', 'The French Connection', 'The Italian Job', 'Cannonball Run', and 'The Blues Brothers'. The gameplay feels designed to enable you to relive the sliding-down-an-alley-knocking-over-cardboard-boxes chaos of those memorable chases, and it was for exactly this reason that such a comprehensive action replay editor was included. Indeed, Edmondson hails the quality of the replays as *Driver*'s "greatest achievement", perhaps shedding light on the development process behind their forthcoming *Stuntman* on PS2.

What's more impressive is the way that *Driver*'s cinematic borrowings are incorporated into the game itself. The presence of the love-it-or-loathe-it garage trial is predominantly down to the influence of celluloid. "It was influenced by the garage sequence in Walter Hill's 1978 picture 'The Driver,'" admits Edmondson. "In it, the eponymous driver (Ryan O'Neal) demonstrates his driving abilities by smashing up an orange Mercedes. In the event though, I wish we'd made it optional because I know it really pissed a lot of people off."

The inclusion of such console-unfriendly eccentricities as the garage test, is one of the things that make *Driver* so noticeable. A testament that behind the opulence of the Antonio 'Huggy Bear' Fargas starring adverts the creation of the game was a lot less surefooted – a sure sign of the false starts and stuttering that characterises real innovation. And it's clear that Edmondson has had second thoughts on many of the game's most famous features. Of the cut-scenes he says, "They were extremely simple and, looking back on them, pretty poor, due to lack of time and resources. We could also have done with a few more to help the player follow the story more." Even the famous answer-phone-as-mission-choosing-mechanism isn't exempt from criticism. "Having mission choices in *Driver* is something I regret to an extent. It made it impossible to tie all the missions into a story." And what about the insane difficulty level of the last mission, 'The President's Run'? "Yes, perhaps it was too hard also," admits Edmondson, sheepishly, before adding, "it is absolutely possible though."

But **Edge** notes that while many of the problems of these peripheral features were 'fixed' for the sequel – the first game is still the title that stands out. The reason being simply, that while the cut-scenes in *Driver 2* may be more impressive, the difficulty level more forgiving and the incidentals more polished, it just wasn't as entertaining. "We probably pushed the envelope too far with *Driver 2*," says Edmondson. "We added more cars, curved roads, getting out of the vehicles, splitscreen... *Driver* was simpler, it ran faster, and had a longer draw distance... I have to admit that if it comes to ten minutes of ragging around the streets I prefer *Driver* because it feels better." But perhaps more importantly, the freedom to drive anywhere (the whole point of Edmondson's initial crossroads idea) was badly curtailed in the sequel.

Similar vision

What's also very interesting about *Driver* is that while Reflections' was dreaming up its freeform 3D driving world, Rockstar was honing a similar vision for its equally prophetic *Grand Theft Auto* series. Edmondson comments, "*Driver* started development well before *GTA* was announced but I must admit I was worried when I read the first *GTA* press releases because it did sound like *Driver*." However, while for most people Reflections' racers surpass the PlayStation incarnations of the *GTA* series, what does he make of the distinctively *Driver*-like synthesis of the two competing titles in *GTAIII*? "From a design point of view, yes, I was impressed. If you're talking technically, visually or vehicle dynamics, then no, it's very disappointing." Touché.

Not that Edmondson needs to worry about the continued critical standing of *Driver* though. Because while *Driver* is much imitated now, just like *Mario Kart* (though not quite in the same league), Reflections' racer has managed to maintain its superiority over the many pretenders to the throne. It's the handling, the real cities, the civilian vehicles, the mix of the ultra cool and incredibly cheesy... and yes, its cinematic nature, which make *Driver* special.

RESET

Where yesterday's gaming goes to have a lie down

reload

Examining gaming history from **Edge**'s perspective, five years ago this month



Issue 47, July 1997

So it finally happened. Matsushita pulled the plug on M2, the stalwart of the news section disappeared, and the magazine's response was scathing. "This decision represents a final kick in the teeth for those who stood by the format during its teething problems," **Edge** spat, wondering where its next story was coming from. But by the end of the piece, the ground had been laid for the future. "**Edge** has heard rumours," ran the text, speculating on a new M-initiative, "Of a higher hardware specification, and one that encompasses DVD and Internet initiatives." Oh. How very vague.

The magazine itself, meanwhile, was struggling to cope with CD initiatives; **E**47's flimsy gatefold cover was host to a "foray into the world of digital media", a CD packed full of screenshots and trance music. The fungal numeeja spread through the printed page, too, a detailed look at *Virtual Springfield* and *Riven* inspiring yawns nationwide.

At least Mucky Foot liked *interactive* entertainment; its first recruitment ad had only a contact address, and this, in big, bold type: "Less pay. Longer Hours. No Healthcare. No Bullshit. Just Games."



DID THEY REALLY SAY THAT?

"42 tracks – the largest number ever" – Infogrames' advert for *V-Rally* boastfully rewrites the rules of mathematics

DID EDGE REALLY SAY THAT?

"The quality of the engine and detail of the environments are already well ahead of the pack... The game isn't due out until November..." Things looked good in '97, *Daikatana* wasn't so much ahead of the pack when it was actually released, midway through 2000

TESTSCREENS (AND RATINGS)

Little Big Adventure 2: Twinsen's Odyssey (PC, 7/10); *Overblood* (PS, 7/10); *V-Rally* (PS, 8/10); *Runabout* (PS, 7/10); *Wild Arms* (PS, 8/10); *Conquest Earth* (PC, 8/10); *Ace Combat 2* (PS, 6/10)



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1. *Wild Arms*: "The finest translated RPG for the PS to date" 2. Phillip Mitchell, creator of *The Hobbit* 3. 'Virtual presenter' Laura, frontwoman for Japanese TV programme 'Digital Chat' 4. Sony goes all out for the crusty *Tribal* market 5. A pale, ghostly, poorly mocked-up M2 awaits the reaper 6. *Lamborghini 64*, a demonstration of Titus' 'not-inconsiderable ambition'

pixelperfect

The industry's favourites from yesteryear. This month, Tony Mott, producer at Bam! Entertainment, recalls being good at a game





Juno First was more than capable of bringing a frown to the face of dedicated gamers

Growing up, we got our kicks at a greasy-spoon kind of joint that just happened to be home to around 15 cigarette-scarred arcade machines. It was here, after school at around four o'clock when I should've been doing homework or something equally tossy, that I was introduced to the likes of *Track 'n' Field*, *Gyruss* and *Roc 'n' Rope*. A less popular machine was *Juno First*, which could be described as *Defender* played out on a vertical, rather than horizontal, plane.

I don't recall what drew me to it – perhaps it was the simplistic presentation, which made it stand out against the likes of 'new wave' coin-ops such as Capcom's *Trojan*. Whatever the case, after about ten goes I knew this was *my* game – the one whose hi-score table would always record my endeavours right there at the very top.

Back then, arcade games could be *mastered* (the very notion of a quid-to-continue coin-op would've had us in stitches in the mid-'80s). And so it came to pass: my last ever game of *Juno First*, at ten pence, began at two o'clock in the afternoon and finished when the manager rudely turned off the power at six. Nirvana – while it lasted.

FAQ

Mike Gamble
business development director, MathEngine



After stints at Hasbro, Epic, Sega Europe and Microsoft (where he was European manager of the Windows thirdparty gaming group), Gamble now drives MathEngine's commercialisation within the games industry.

What was the first videogame you played?
It was a *Space Invaders* clone on a Commodore Pet, which my stepdad had kindly (ahem) borrowed for me, from the Harwell Atomic Energy Research Establishment, to prevent me from going mad when I was convalescing from two broken arms sustained in a motorcycling accident. The game was one of those where you typed in a listing from a magazine, which wasn't too easy with two broken arms.

What was the first computer/games machine you owned?
After the Pet, I was hooked. I chose a Sinclair Spectrum over the Commodore 64 because of its 'killer app', the state-of-the-art text adventure (with some pictures), *The Hobbit*.

What was your first job in the industry, and what was the first thing you ever designed?
I was a producer at Epic – a Brighton-based games developer which had grown out of a multimedia company, in case anyone might confuse this with the infamous Epic Megagames of *Unreal* fame. I worked on the design of the first couple of levels of a game called *Drowned God*. Look it up on the Web it's, erm, interesting. The company didn't survive, but it's interesting that everyone who worked there is still involved in the industry at a number of UK development houses and service companies.

What's the first game you look for when you walk into an arcade?
The 'grab a cuddly toy' cranes (the only time I hit the arcades is with my kids on Brighton Pier). I'm quite unusual for someone of my generation in that I didn't get into games through first dabbling in arcade games. I always found arcades to be quite scary places (I'm still afraid that if I go into one a big boy will steal my lunch money).

What game would you most like to have worked on?
Sudden Strike, it's the digital version of playing with Airfix soldiers. All of the vehicles and troops are so detailed that it's obvious the developer was engaged in a real labour of love.

Of all the game you've been involved in in the past, what's your favourite, and why?
Taking into account all my DirectX work, I'd say *G-Police*. It was one of the first titles to really use D3D well and the first convincing realtime execution of a cyberpunk environment.

What stage is your current project at?
Karma, our Physics/Dynamics SDK, is on point releases now, and we unveiled KAT (Karma Authoring Tool) at GDC.

Which aspect of it do you think will impress players the most?
Well, if we're doing our job properly, then players won't even know that it's there. From a developer's point of view, I would hope that it will be the ability to visually assign physical properties to objects and tune their reactions before their placement into a game.

"The mainstream press still thinks we are a bunch of spotty geeks masturbating over Lara Croft. My spots cleared up years ago"

What's your favourite game ever, and why?
Close Combat 2. It's the only game I have put on every PC I have owned, play regularly and have still not finished.

What was the last game you played, and what did you think of it?
Medal of Honor: Allied Assault. I played it right through and really enjoyed it – although I was a little disappointed at the linearity of the gameplay (especially in the Normandy landing scene) and the unrealistic nature of the inventory (being able to carry a vast arsenal of weapons, etc). That said, it's rare for me to finish a game so quickly.

What new development in videogames would you most like to see?
The freeing of the creative process from the technology tree. It's probably a pipe dream, but I would hope that we will one day reach a stage where developers no longer have to worry about programming every element of their game from scratch, but can dive straight into the important part of game-making – putting the fun in.

What disappoints you about the industry?
The sheer waste of 90 per cent of the industry's effort on games that will never sell.

What do you enjoy most about working in the videogame industry?
Anything is achievable given dedication and hard work. You don't need to come from the right school, university or club to make it. It's also a bit rock and roll. Which is nice.

Whose work do you most admire?
The usual thing is for people to respond to this question with the name of an obscure Japanese designer, isn't it? I can't do that though, as I'm not really a huge fan of Japanese games. Off the top of my head, I'd say Tim Sweeney, Warren Spector or Peter Molyneux, but I've come to realise that gaming is a collaborative art, so it wouldn't seem right to single out any individual.

What new gaming platform are you most looking forward to?
I'm really looking forward to the GameCube. Everything that I've seen looks like it will be great fun. That said, I'm a PC gamer at heart so the gaming platform I'm most looking forward to is probably a four gigahertz PC with a GeForce9.

What pleases/disappoints you about the way videogames are discussed in both the specialist and mainstream press?
The specialist press is still hooked on technology as being the 'be all' of game development, while the mainstream press still thinks we are a bunch of spotty geeks hiding out in darkened rooms masturbating over Lara Croft. My spots cleared up years ago.

inbox

Communicate by post:
Letters, **Edge**, 30 Monmouth Street, Bath BA1 2BW
Or email:
edge@futurenet.co.uk

I enjoyed your feature on minority interests and gaming. I think I'm fairly lucky having a partner who likes playing games, and I fully agree with Grrlgamer.com's Nikki Douglas that it's the quality of the game which makes a difference not some, often patronising, 'girly' features. The downside of having a gaming partner is the arguments – have you ever tried to share a GBA with *Advance Wars*? Needless to say we both have one now, much to the bemusement of our middle-aged pals.

The most amazing game I've ever seen for appealing to female gamers, though, is *Phantasy Star Online*. I was astounded to see my girlfriends rush to buy Dreamcasts to play it, but one of my friends bought a widescreen television to improve her gaming only to stop playing *PSO* – it seems it made her character, Trix, too fat. Perhaps some form of avatar anorexia?

Doug Jeffrey

I've just read Minority Report in **E**110. As a long time gamer, and a British Indian, I feel that the race 'issue' in this article was somewhat exaggerated.

"You've got 16 characters to choose from and not one of them looks like me," states Shahid Ahmad. But does that really matter? You want to identify with a character. I do not see how, by having someone that has the same skin colour as you, can allow you to identify with them any more. When I play a game, I relate to the characters (and hence like or dislike them) by their actions, thoughts and speech, and not by the way they look. I have not come across a game character that was designed to be exclusively understood by only one race. It is really quite annoying, because, in a way, it's similar to a racist differentiating people just because of the amount of melanin in their skin. Most characters would be the same whatever race they were. What is the point in having a character exactly the same as you, anyway? It would defeat the whole concept of escapism that is gaming. And in any case, gamers identify with characters and situations that they have no knowledge of in real life. I've never had to save the world from an alien invasion, or go on a crime spree, or shoot some zombies, but I've done it through gaming.

Then there's the notion that games don't attract minority groups because there aren't any characters to 'represent' them. That's like saying that I don't see a film because the lead character is white. It's completely absurd. I have many friends of different races, and race does not come into it where gaming is concerned.

Developers could include a character customisation feature in their games (like those in sports games). This would let the player to create their own characters, to look how they want. However, I *like* characters that have been designed by developers, to match the personalities, and of course they are used to sell the game. The main problem as far as far as representation in games is catering for female gamers. Most games with storylines are from a male point of view, and with a plot tailored for males. The way that this will change is with more females in the industry. As far as sexuality of characters goes, a character does have to state "I'm gay" to be homosexual. That said, there aren't any games I can think of that have plots with gay characters and a homosexual point of view.

Charanjeet Kondal

I was sat next to a young black guy playing *Street Fighter* on his GBA, when I read your feature on the lack of female/non-white/gay protagonists in videogames (Minority Report, **E**110). At the time, Shahid Ahmad's qualm about the lack of Asian characters in a game where you might have more than ten characters to choose from – ie fighting games, RPGs – seemed particularly hollow. I looked over at what character the stranger next to me was playing (you guessed it – Ryu).

Does anybody know what ethnic background Ryu is? You probably think he's Japanese. That's funny, because when I first played *Street Fighter* as an innocent 12-year-old, I thought he was just a bunch of pixels. And if pushed on the matter, I would have said all the characters, including Dhalsim, were Japanese. I mean, that is where th game is from isn't it? Anyway, any half-decent gamer chooses a character based on its abilities, not because it resembles their own personality an physical appearance. If they did want to see themselves, why isn't there a fat balding guy that you can unlock in *Soul Calibur*?

I completely agree that in videogames, and media in general, there is an under representation of anyone who is not a white straight male. My point is that the game's protagonist is not the be-and-end-all of making a universal and unbiased game. After all, the whole point of playing a game is to become someone else for a while – and it's usually someone with supernatural powers, or wh owns a spaceship.

For me, the differences between people are based on culture not colour. That is why I loved sitting through *Shenmue II* in Japanese – a game that I believe represents the pinnacle of cross cultural gaming media (a Japanese guy who has a Rastafarian best friend, and is stuck in Hong Kong while trying to get to rural China?), and I even learned some Japanese in the process – bonus. There's a long way to go until my Pakistani granny can choose a sari-wearing avatar to play in a sitar-based music game – but lets not be too hard on ourselves, games have done more than most media to teach white straight males about what lie outside the western world – albeit with an oriental focus. As far as I'm concerned, and based on the present evidence, things can only get better for players of all backgrounds. Thanks for tackling the issue with such an interesting article.

Samad Masood

Clearly the industry needs to tread a fine line between escapism and representation. But the fac remains that the videogame industry continues to unwittingly endorse some potentially damaging stereotypes regarding race, gender, and sexuality. the industry is to mature and attract a broader audience, this fact needs to be addressed.

"Lets not be too hard on ourselves, games have done more than most media to teach white straight males about what lies outside the western world – albeit with an oriental focus"



Alexander Rasera would argue that Kojima-san's efforts to make *MGS2* replayable are insufficient in the face of competition from other PS2 titles

I would like to comment on the feature you ran in **E**110 on the industry's lack of catering for the disabled community. In the feature you mention the plight of deaf gamers and how some games use colour coding on radars, etc, which prove useful features to such gamers. Although I agree with these comments, by catering for one 'minority' of gamers you also alienate another. For example, the colour coding on radars to pinpoint objectives, etc, is a common feature in many a game (*GTAIII*, *Agent Under Fire*, etc) and for colourblind people such as myself can prove a nightmare and can often result in me dragging my wife (a strong anti-gamer) to sit over my shoulder shouting colours to me so I know where to follow and where to avoid. Colour has long been and always will be prevalent in games but surely icons can be used so as to not render certain elements of the game unusable to those such as myself.
Steve Lee

I read the feature in **E**110 regarding the games industry and disabled gamers. As a disabled gamer myself, I would like to state that the videogame industry still has much to learn from the disabled gamer. The console that I use is the PlayStation, which I chose over the Nintendo 64, or Dreamcast as the controller is more suited to my style of play. I have been in contact with Namco which states that it intends to push the boundaries of accessibility for disabled gamers, so progress has begun. The next stage is for developers, console designers, etc, to feel that the disabled community must not be left out. Until the videogame industry promotes games to people who are disabled we still have a long way to go regarding what is right for the disabled gamer.
Jane Caroline

Lately I have become quite irritated by a trend which seems to afflict most of today's videogames. This trend is paradoxically referred to as 'replayability'. I say paradoxically because, in theory, most games are not as replayable as the developers would have you believe. Under certain conditions, one could be tempted to finish game X a second or even a third time but I refuse to believe that these conditions occur with anything resembling regularity. I will explain those conditions in a few moments.

For instance, let's take a closer look at *Tony Hawk 3* and *Metal Gear Solid 2*, both for the PS2. These games not only look and sound stunning, they are also wonderfully playable. However, are they 'replayable'? Most game publications seem to think so. That's where my conditions enter the fray. For instance, *Metal Gear Solid 2* would be worthy of a second attempt if it was the only game in my possession and the PS2 my sole system. But what are the chances of that happening nowadays? I think it is reasonably safe to assume that at least 50 per cent of gamers own more than one PS2 game. In other words, you would have to be beyond hardcore to finish *Metal Gear Solid 2* a second time to see all it has to offer, or it would have to be your only game. Collecting all the dog tags isn't fun, it's boring. As is replaying the extended bomb-dismantling mission on the big shell which I found unusually tiresome the first time. Let's face it, games which rely on sprawling narratives do not lend themselves to repeat discovery although a solid case can be made for *Deus Ex* on the PC. Which brings me to *Tony Hawk 3*.

Neversoft's game, like a good arcade game, can be enjoyed again and again thanks to its combo-friendly gameplay and huge levels. Seasoned gamers can always outdo themselves and beginners will learn quickly courtesy of the intuitive controls. However, once all the levels have been unlocked with one skater, who in their right mind would do it all over again with the rest of the gang? Agreed, some obectives may alter as will some skater's styles but is that sufficient incentive to finish *Tony Hawk 3* ten to fifteen times? Surely, that's not enjoyable, is it? Well, it might be if it's your only game.

Developers need to devise more ingenious ways to extend the lifespan of their software. For instance, it is well known that completing *Tony Hawk 3* several times will reveal additional characters including Darth Maul. Rather than characters simply being made available on the character select screen, the costumes could be hidden in the levels, requiring new tricks to obtain them. As for *Metal Gear Solid 2*, I fail to see how playing it again will result in anything other than a boring experience. Instead, what Kojima-san should have done is distil actual gameplay from those admittedly thrilling cinematics.

For instance, when the tanker sinks at the end of part one, the whole event is presented as a cut-scene with Metal Gear escaping and Solid Snake seemingly not making it out alive. My proposal would be to replace it with an interactive section – while the tanker slowly sinks, Snake has to swim his way to freedom, finding not-yet-submerged rooms to replenish his oxygen. Meanwhile, the hull is creaking ominously and actually caving in left and right. Suddenly, an implosion followed by a scream. Part one has just ended and Snake died in realtime and it's all your fault. That's how you increase the duration of such games, not by expecting gamers to play them again to collect dog tags or try a more stealthy approach. I know I wouldn't. Unless it were my only game.
Alexander Rasera

Edge would contest your assessment of the replayability of *MGS2*, particulary since skipping the cut-scenes after playing it through once allows players to ignore the sprawling (and some might say intrusive) narrative.

You're right to point out, though, that the sheer number of videogames either currently available or slated for release requires developers to devise new ways to keep gamers gaming. Perhaps the biggest challenge facing the videogame industry is not with the wallets of gamers, but with the dwindling amount of leisure time that they have at their disposal. Which leads nicely into...

"You would have to be beyond hardcore to finish MGS2 a second time to see all it has to offer, or it would have to be your only game. Collecting the dog tags isn't fun, it's boring"



Is the academic community qualified to draw a superficial line between ludology and narratology if it hasn't played titles like *Planescape: Torment*?

I am writing to tell you about a problem of mine – an issue that has been growing in my mind over the last year. I've always been a gaming fan, from Spectrum through to Xbox, from 386 to P4. Sure, there have been other hobbies (mountain biking, hah), but the only one that's lasted more than a few months is gaming. Recently, though, I've become really concerned with the quality of games. But it's not something I can put my finger on, and what I want to know is, is it me or my machine? I'm not talking about run-of-the-mill games either. I mean games like *Halo* (why didn't it have the same impact on me as *GoldenEye*), *Project Gotham Racing* (*Gran Turismo* – the first one), *MGS2* (*Metal Gear Solid*) – the list goes on.

All of these new releases have nothing about them that you can criticise. All have excellent graphics, sound and structure. And when playing them for the first time they are breathtaking. But they don't seem to have the same addictiveness. There doesn't seem to be the need to stay up for hours, frantically trying to complete them. I don't fantasise about playing them when I have to do something else. In fact, sometimes I choose to do something other than play games. So what I want to know is this: am I, as an avid but critical gamer, making a valid point about next-gen games, or, at the ripe old age of 20, am I growing out of gaming? I hope the latter is not the case, but if it is, I'll have to console myself with PC games, which I believe are still as immersive as console games used to be. What I hope will happen, and this is a point recently illustrated by **Edge**'s editor in 'Get Smart' [Times supplement], is that within the next couple of years, quality of graphics on next-gen consoles won't be an issue, and playability will once again take the limelight.
Malcolm Rollo

If you find *Halo* underwhelming, then there's little **Edge** can do to help. Perhaps you are indeed growing out of games. But perhaps your ennui is actually a reflection of a seemingly ever-increasing release schedule, made up of an ever-decreasing range of subject matter. If the videogame industry is ever to achieve a lasting cultural relevance, it has to look further than flooding the market with me-too product.

With reference to the article Learning Curve (**E**109), I carry out lectures on videogaming issues, involving demonstrations of games to university staff and students. Most of the audience usually has some familiarity with games, but a significant minority of both students and staff do not. Repeatedly, it transpires that this minority largely believe games to be violent, crude and simplistic. These opinions stem from mainstream media stories, and from gaming experience often limited to a frustrating game of *Space Invaders* or *Pac-Man* in their youth.

While statistics about games and their widespread use often raise eyebrows, it is the demonstration of games that usually changes perceptions. *Jet Set Radio* on a large lecture room screen frequently results in gasps and calls of "Can I have a go?" – most often from the staff. Shoving the rod controller into the hands of a disgruntled humanities lecturer, resplendent in tweed and nearing retirement, and getting him to catch a fish in *Sega Bass Fishing* produced a rapid revision of attitude. Twoplayer *Advance Wars* against a professor of military history resulted in a recommendation to his students to play and explore the tactical options.

Perhaps filling high street stores with game pods is merely preaching to the converted. Putting a selection of consoles and games in university and college staff rooms would result in a greater appreciation – and subsequent dissemination – of contemporary games.
John Kirriemuir

Well **Edge** agrees wholeheartedly, although one of our own university professors would (in fact did) argue that college bars have quite enough of "those infernal machines."

Having read the Learning Curve feature in **E**109 I think both **Edge** and the academics fail to see they are arguing over a trivial matter. You can't debate the merits of either ludology or narratology because they are taken out of context; the game in question.

There are two types of games: The ludological type, and those that rely on narrative to make the game more compelling, and debating which is 'right' is probably fruitless.

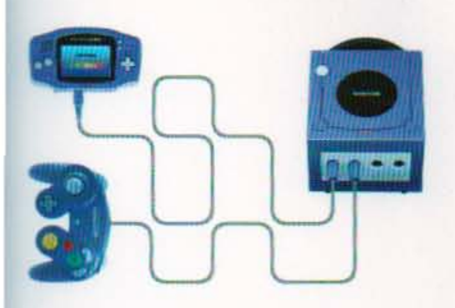
Maybe all these academics should be sent a copy of *Planescape: Torment* and forced to play through it twice using different classes. Then we might actually see some interesting points raised. How can one debate the future of narrative in games when one hasn't even played some of the finest examples of narrative-based games?
Anon

Surely the videogame medium is a broad enough church to keep both ludologists and narratologists happy.

Currently studying for my PGCE in Secondary Art & Design (teacher training), I am writing an assignment on assessment in schools. Spending two thirds of the year teaching, I have become slightly disenchanted by the way pupils' artwork is marked in schools; "Why is it that the teachers always seem to give seven out of ten for an average piece of work?" I kept thinking, and "Where've I heard that before?" Then of course I realised, the **Edge** system. I have always admired your marking system and I have introduced it to m[y] classes. Of course my pupils believe it to be unfair (probably because they all dropped two marks) and my fellow teachers quietly disapprove but I wil[l] not budge. And when I begin teaching next year the **Edge** system will go on my wall to remind all what a fair marking system looks like.
Rob Appleby

Phew. Future generations of school kids are finally in safe hands.

> "Putting a selection of consoles and games in university and college staff rooms would result in a greater appreciation – and subsequent dissemination – of contemporary games"





Grand Theft Auto III manages to balance a high level of user immersion with a true sense of freedom according to James Bailey

From the forum

A selection of choice cuts from Edge-Online's discussion outlet (www.futureforums.co.uk/edge/)

Subject: **Balancing user immersion with freedom**
Poster: **James Bailey**
Balancing user immersion with freedom in games seem to be a constant debating point among players and most probably game creators. Games like *Final Fantasy* get criticised for being too structured and linear, that the plot limits the players' ability to truly immerse themselves. The flip side of the coin is *Shenmue*, criticised for allowing too much freedom within its environment at the expense of narrative development. From what I've gathered, *Grand Theft Auto III* seems to have balanced these two areas perfectly. But is this an example of a perfect game?

Does a game really suffer for being too narrative led, or allowing too much freedom? This argument has raged before, but has anyone truly considered that games have actually secretly evolved into new genres that deserve their individual development – or is that perhaps separate directions for the videogame industry to develop in?

There are immersive narrative games, such as *Metal Gear Solid*. Will the industry favour this genre and try to rival its close cousin, the film industry? Then there are immersive freedom games, like *Shenmue*. Will the industry favour this genre and help it mature with the advent of online console gaming and along with MUDs?

Both genres can co-exist, I'm sure. But what future would you rather see for the industry? Games that offer immersion on a very personal level, or a social one; eg *Metal Gear Solid 5* or *Shenmue VI*? Perhaps the industry, instead of second guessing its own future, should be addressing issues concerning its development?

Poster: **Sledge**
I'm not sure how useful it is to talk about 'the industry' as some sort of singular entity in this context. By its very nature, it is composed of many competing cells so, while the emulation of a winning formula is bound to occur, there is always going to be a significant contingent who strive for success through individuality – by going against any given trend. The system is set up to facilitate a certain amount of variety (enough to encompass the broad categories you have defined, anyway) and as long as consumer demand for a range of products exists, that is what 'the industry' will favour. It's fairly straightforward economics.

As an aside though, the developmental demands of narrative certainly factor into its attractiveness for videogame producers... I mean, why pick up such a slippery ball in the first place? Given that there's a fundamentally inversed correlation between the proportion of 'proper' gaming and narrative a title can offer, I can see the likes of *MGS2* struggling to become commonplace and continually competent. I think people underestimate just how stunningly unlikely it is for a narrative to be simultaneously fantastic (thus engaging in its own right) while working equally brilliantly within the context of a game.

Title: **Nagoshi**
Poster: **ska_mad**
If I met him in the street, I'd give him a big hug. I love him. Plainly insane, a bit of a Nintendo fanboy, and totally committed. A truly wonderful person, who I am sure would be just as adorable in the flesh. He's the kind of chap you expect to dress up as Santa for orphans.

Poster: **UKBuckaroo**
Just read Nagoshi in **E**110 and was again warmed by everything I read. What a great piece; makes me ashamed of my inelegant command of the language.

Poster: **Leo**
He seems like a top bloke, but I'm worried about him. He's too soft, and would take a total kicking if he came to Glasgow. So if you're reading this Nagoshi, when you come to Glasgow, I'll protect you. As long as you get here in the next four weeks. Then I move, and you're fucked.

Title: **Gamecube/GBA link-up potential**
Poster: **Lakitu**
What is it? We all know about that *Kirby* game, but what else is there?

Poster: **arada392**
It has immense potential. The problem is that, in my opinion, many people seem to have a rather limited scope of the possibilities. The suggestion that GameCube, Game Boy Advance, and arcade games could connect is a step in the right direction, but there are so many other possibilities than just co-op play or an alternative screen for sports games.

I believe that the future lies in the fact that it has the capability of communication between different systems. Why should this link-up be limited to only a GC game and its GBA counterpart, or vice-versa? Couldn't it be possible to have two GBA games that can connect to one GC game? Depending on which GBA game you choose to play with, it alters the way you proceed in the GC game as well.

"If you're reading this Nagoshi, when you come to Glasgow, I'll protect you. As long as you get here in the next four weeks. Then I move, and you're fucked"

Next month







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